

SUNSTONE

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READERS' FORUM



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son as its publisher, we decided to again mark the leadership change in the masthead by quietly switching the O's slant. The only rigorous debate in the office was not about editorial content but how inclined the slant should be (I thought it was a tad too much, but was outvoted). With Linda Jean's departure in December 1992, we'll probably rearrange the O once again. Since the first issue in 1975, SUNSTONE has had seven mastheads, each reflecting the graphic styles of the time rather than editorial philosophy. Whatever the typeface and design, we will continue to celebrate the wide spectrum of Mormon experience, scholarship, issues, and art that I hope at times will comfort and irk readers who lean to the right and the left.

THE ROLLING STONE

WHAT GIVES? At my study group some one noted that a few issues ago without fanfare SUNSTONE switched the O in the masthead on the cover from leaning to the left to leaning to the right (SUNSTONE 15:6). We got out old issues for several years and analyzed the changing content of the magazine, and some concluded that SUNSTONE has pulled back from the hard-hitting, truth-telling, controversial articles for which it is known. Is this subtle, unannounced, unexplained, and apparently permanent change on all future covers an intentional symbolic message of a new conservative slant in editorial philosophy to appease the right-leaning critics of SUNSTONE? Say it isn't so!

JEANNETTE TWITCHELL
Salt Lake City

Editor's reply:

We value our careful readers, but O so many conservatives and liberals read the worst possible motives into innocent gestures. Several years ago when Daniel Rector and Elbert Peck succeeded Peggy Fletcher Stack as publisher and editor, then SUNSTONE art director Connie Disney and I decided to redesign the look of the magazine. We amusedly observed how the A in *Atlantic* magazine's masthead playfully leaned left, right, and settled straight up. We decided to be a tad playful ourselves and created our new masthead with the O slightly tilted; Connie slanted it left because that was graphically easier to do and looked better. A year ago, when SUNSTONE hired Linda Jean Stephen-

AN APOLOGY

IN CONNECTION WITH your report of events and publicity last August concerning the Strengthening Church Members Committee ("Church Defends Keeping Files on Members," SUNSTONE 16:2), I offer an apology and an invitation.

I am sorry that I spoke out so rashly and angrily—and before I learned more about the Committee or spoke privately to its members about my concerns. My main objection to the Committee (which I wrongly understood to be an ad hoc group of Church employees) was that as a result of its reports people were being punished or at least intimidated without being confronted directly and privately by the offended parties—a process that both our democratic and our Mormon Christian ideals call for (see D&C 42:88 and Matthew 18:15).

Yet in my accusations I violated those same ideals—with what I recognize now was a desire for revenge on those whom I thought had hurt people I know. I have apologized privately and now do so publicly: I regret what I said and the spirit in which I said it.

I also invite all of us to find ways to deal with our differences of opinion, even our offenses, directly and privately—in such a way that both offended and offender can express fully their concerns and hear full explanations and, when necessary, apologize or repent. I invite my colleagues at BYU—and all in the Mormon community as a whole—to refrain from criticizing our leaders and each other in ways that violate that ideal.

I also invite all who are involved in or affected by the actions of the Strengthening

Church Members Committee, including local leaders, to work toward the ideal of open, patient, and direct exchange. I suggest we all report in detail to Committee Members Elders James E. Faust and Russell M. Nelson what is happening to us and those in our care as a result of their Committee's actions, so they can assess those results.

EUGENE ENGLAND
Provo, UT

THE TRUE CHURCH

SO NOW I'M aware of a committee of grown men who, with better things to do, are nonetheless wasting time "monitoring" for the existence of attitudes and activities threatening the health of the institution.

I agree with Eugene England as reported in your news story, whose writings were influential in easing much of the anger and frustration I've come to feel in the past few years, that a committee such as the SCMC will inevitably do more harm than good.

The use of section 123 of the Doctrine and Covenants as justification for the "need" and activities of the committee makes the Church guilty of the same sort of thinking that has been part and parcel of anti-LDS rhetoric for years: finding something

"scriptural" with which to don a cloak of integrity to justify faulty reasoning.

The larger issue is, of course, the attitude seemingly prevalent among the general leadership of the Church that the membership must be censored and discouraged from publicly expressing any attitude contrary to the Church. According to *U.S. News & World Report*, the LDS church is at the point of becoming a major world religion with a projected future membership of hundreds of millions. If that is so, then the censorship and suppression are not only a sad commentary on real attitudes of the top hierarchy but probably unnecessary.

Does claiming to be the "One True and Living Church on the Face of the Earth" bring with it a responsibility to suppress any activity within the Church that is contrary to that proposition? If any institution holds status as the official instrument of deity, that institution could justifiably rely on divine sanction in surviving on the earth without having to worry about what is said or done by anybody, not just opponents. I would like an honest and forthright explanation from the leadership on why suppression, albeit gentle, loving, and spiritual, is good for the souls of the membership.

What is there about God's plan that en-

courages the notion that in the world are many "weak" and "vulnerable" testimonies that might be forever damaged by the questioning or dissent from other members? What sort of God would permit such a thing to occur? Although I don't believe that members who consider themselves "strong" and "established" in the Church have any mandate to speak their minds without responsibility for what they say, I certainly question the notion that one member has the persuasive power to endanger *eternally* the spirit of another. I am accountable for what I say and do, and if another accepts what I say without ever questioning and testing my words, then that person is ultimately accountable. Otherwise, the interweaving of guilt and responsibility for all our social intercourse over our lifetimes creates the vision of a judgment day so complicated that it is absurd.

A "true church" that is threatened by the dissent of some of its members perhaps ought to rethink the implications of its self-perceptions—and evince a greater trust in the strength of the testimonies of those who dissent because it takes a strong testimony to remain in the Church when doubts arise.

ART RUGER
Vancouver, WA





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NEW MORMON HYSTERIA

NEAL W. KRAMER'S letter (SUNSTONE 16:2) demonstrates how the discussion of New Mormon History by its critics has been "rancorous, paranoid, and deliberately slanderous" (his words). Kramer claims that the New Mormon Historians regard "the weakness of Traditional Mormon History is its unwillingness to adopt these [modern historical] standards and to wistfully rely on talk about the supernatural. Instead of relying on physical evidence and the rules of reason, the Traditionalists inject metaphysics into their work." He claims that "New Mormon Historian counterparts" oppose "Mormon history that openly supports, or at least accepts as legitimate, traditional claims about God's role in the restoration and building of the kingdom."

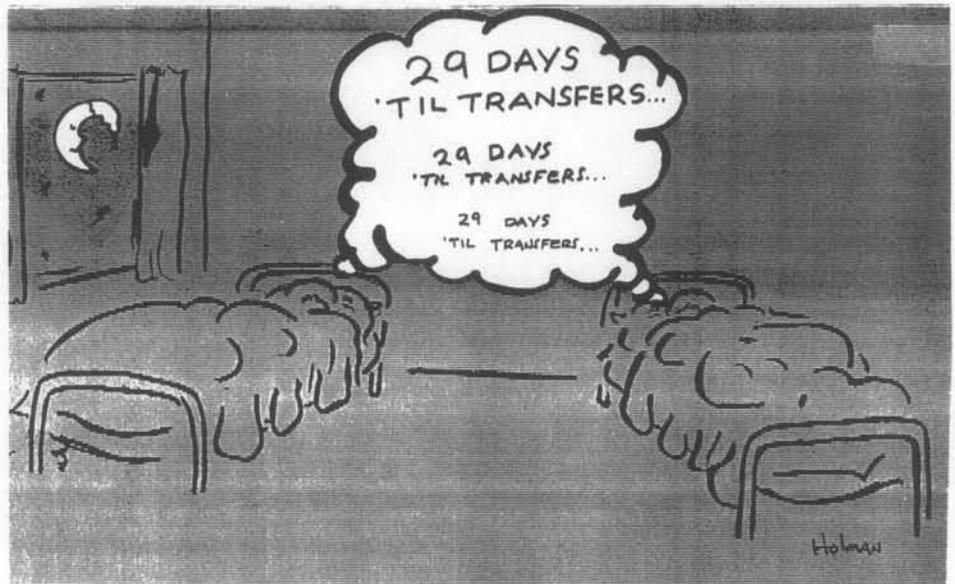
This is the familiar drum-beat and false dichotomy of Louis Midgley, David E. Bohn, Neal W. Kramer, and others that New Mormon Historians reject the revelatory, visionary, and metaphysical in the New History's reconstruction of the Mormon past. The other side of their false dichotomy is that New Mormon Historians criticize Traditional Historians for making affirmations of faith and for including supernatural events and explanations in traditional history of Mormonism. Traditional Historians are a diverse bunch, as are New Mormon Historians. However, the Midgley-Bohn-Kramer dichotomy falsely stigmatizes most of the New Mormon Historians I know.

To name prominent examples within the New Mormon History, matter-of-fact references to Joseph Smith's vision of God and Jesus, the appearance of Moroni and other angels, the gold plates, or other metaphysical

events are in revisionist histories by Lavina Fielding Anderson, Leonard J. Arrington, James B. Allen, Daniel W. Bachman, Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, Davis Bitton, Richard L. Bushman, Jill Mulvay Derr, Reed C. Durham, Andrew F. Ehat, Ronald K. Esplin, Kenneth W. Godfrey, William G. Hartley, Donna Hill, Marvin S. Hill, Richard L. Jensen, Dean C. Jessee, Stanley B. Kimball, Carol Cornwall Madsen, Dean L. May, Linda King Newell, Max H. Parkin, Charles S. Peterson, Grant Underwood, Ronald W. Walker, and David J. Whittaker.

Even my revisionist examination of the esoteric and occult dimensions in Mormonism's origins affirmed the reality of the metaphysical events in Joseph Smith's experience. However, because I explored those little-known circumstances surrounding foundational events of early Mormonism, Kramer's fellow travelers dismiss as irrelevant my affirmation of the reality of Joseph Smith's visions and the Book of Mormon's historicity. They class me among their *bete noir* revisionists.

In like manner, Midgley-Bohn-Kramer class Richard L. Bushman as a "good guy" Traditional Mormon Historian, even though his *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* concluded that the Prophet organized the Church in April 1830 before the visit of Peter, James, and John. Thus, Bushman disputes the 1829 dating of this priesthood restoration by every traditional Mormon account from B. H. Roberts to Joseph Fielding Smith to the current *Church Almanac*. Bushman's analysis means that the divinely restored LDS church existed for a time without the Melchizedek priesthood and without the authority of the apostleship. If Bushman's book is not a revisionist history, then I don't know what could be. However, I also know



Richard Bushman is a devout believer whose faith permeates his every publication about Mormon history.

In my experience, the New Mormon Historians I've listed do not criticize Traditional Mormon History for accepting "as legitimate, [the] traditional claims about God's role in the restoration and building of the kingdom." Instead, we regard as inadequate and distorted the following examples of Traditional Mormon History.

Official LDS history presents the Missouri persecutions of 1838 as the acts of irrational anti-Christians. Traditional Mormon Historians usually fail to note that Mormon bloc-voting overpowered the non-Mormons politically, and that Joseph Smith published Sidney Rigdon's sermon that dared mobs to attack the Mormon community. The pamphlet even threatened Missourians with "a war of extermination . . . for we will carry the seat of war to their own houses, and their own families. . . ." Governor Boggs was not first to use the word "extermination."

New Mormon Historians also criticize: biographies of Brigham Young that fail to even mention that he had plural wives; Church histories that assert that Apostles John W. Taylor and Matthias F. Cowley were solely responsible for fourteen years of new plural marriages after the Manifesto, when the First Presidency actually authorized the new marriages; discussions of Brigham Young's "so-called Adam-God doctrine" that claim he gave only one talk that was misunderstood, when in fact he repeatedly preached this controversial doctrine for the last twenty-five years of his life.

In sum, New Mormon Historians have criticized instances where Traditional Mormon History sanitizes the Mormon past of human infallibility, ignores topics obviously relevant to the subject of discussion, portrays events contrary to the available evidence, fails to acknowledge even the existence of "controversial" evidence about the subject under discussion, or posits that "the hand of God" is the only needful explanation for any event in the Mormon experience. Contrary to the implications of Midgley-Bohn-Kramer-and-company, New Mormon Historians do not argue with the bulk of Traditional Mormon History, which affirms divine events, faith, sacrifices, and heroism that New Mormon Historians also affirm.

I have always opposed those who present the Mormon past from a perspective that excludes the possibility that there is objective reality to divine revelation, visions, and angelic manifestations. However, exclusion of metaphysical realities is not what character-

izes the massive New Mormon History; there has been a consistent fraud on the part of Midgley, Bohn, Kramer, and others who assert or imply that the New Mormon History excludes the divine.

D. MICHAEL QUINN
Salt Lake City

CODE WORDS

IN YOUR SUNSPOT on "Mormon-Correct Language" (SUNSTONE 16:2), you could have noted other LDS terms that have been changed. For example, *premortal life* replaced the illogical *pre-existence* (how can there be something before existence?). And you neglected the most contemporary and obvious new terms: SUNSTONE and its symposiums (to use Elbert Peck's modern plural form) are never mentioned by name by Church leaders—they always use the code-words *alternate voices* and *symposia* (the Latin plural used in the [in]famous Statement [SUNSTONE 15:4], perhaps showing Elder Dallin Oaks's legal hand in its drafting). Someone needs to supplement Scott Card's *Saintspeak* with a compilation of recently coined terms, many of which are really euphemisms to

avoid acknowledging the unpleasant rather than updated phrases that better convey current correct thinking.

SAMUEL BARNARD
San Jose, CA

ANOTHER LOOK

ROBERT A. REES is undeniably one of the most articulate and compassionate of the Church's apologists. His "Forgiving the Church and Loving the Saints: Spiritual Evolution and the Kingdom of God" (SUNSTONE 16:1) was a cooling zephyr across the torrid landscape Joseph F. Wyson and his ilk stake out in their zeal to purge SUNSTONE of all heterodoxy (see letters "Children of Light," SUNSTONE 15:3, and "A Narrow Gate," SUNSTONE 16:1). Nevertheless, an apologist Rees remains, and apologia, despite its soothing timbre, is sometimes more disquieting than diatribe. While it is easy to take issue with the likes of Wyson, the Mormon apologists invite a more thoughtful response. I offer the following observations.

Rees begins by acknowledging diversity and complexity and by confessing his own struggles—reassuring words to SUNSTONE



readers yearning for something, anything, beyond the simplistic formulas offered up from the pulpit and the Church's captive press. But he quickly (and I think unwittingly) slips into the facile moralism he purports to eschew. For example, after observing that we sometimes judge others "for not abiding by our personal view of what the Church should be," Rees proceeds to do precisely that—albeit in sugar-coated terms. Adopting a dubious, arbitrary moral hierarchy, Rees seems to say that spiritual progress involves nothing more than increasing fealty tolerance, but he finds it hard to conceal his judgment of those (such as his long-time friend and the member of his former congregation) who choose not to stick with the Church's program. We are left with the impression that they are now utterly without hope, drifting aimlessly through lives of suffering toward eternal misery. But, for all we know, they could be perfectly happy and finally at peace with themselves and their god. Rees's barely concealed judgment reinforces the notion (which Wyson at least declares unequivocally) that only the straight and narrow path leads to such happiness and peace, here or hereafter—a judgment directly contrary to the moral of the stories and anecdotes Rees cites. When Rees finally gets around to the point that spiritual evolution ultimately consists of growing in one's desire and ability to love, he first trivializes it by citing pop psychology, and then reduces it once again to a matter of simple obedience to the Church and the commandments. Rees thus remains squarely within the comfortable confines of the "limited point of view" he says we should strive to avoid.

I agree with Rees that many faithful, loving, striving Latter-day Saints are frustrated and often in great pain. Could it be, however, that this is not merely because some individuals in the Church's patriarchal hierarchy appear racist or sexist or homophobic or

otherwise intolerant and unloving? Could it be that the institution itself, in its doctrines, dogmas, organizations, and practices, insidiously reinforces racism, sexism, homophobia, and other attitudes contrary to all but the most narrow interpretation of the Judeo-Christian tradition? Rees seems afraid to ask, let alone answer, such questions.

Rees also speaks of those "who have been physically, psychologically, and sexually abused and who because of this often have an impaired sense of moral reasoning." Could it be (as Rees hints, but again seems afraid to say) that the Church itself is in many cases the perpetrator and perpetuator of such abuse and impairment? Mental health professionals and others (including compassionate LDS bishops) who must try to unsow the seeds of self-loathing can attest to the pernicious ways the Church can become rooted in the conscience. The Mormon apologists, unable or unwilling to analyze the root causes of spiritual devastation, prefer to view the Church as part of the solution rather than part of the problem. It is time to have another look.

I agree with Rees that love—not fear, not the need to please, not obedience—drives spiritual evolution. In my favorite metaphor, love is a stone dropped in a vast, calm ocean, a ripple in the individual heart and soul that radiates outward in ever-widening concentric circles to embrace lovers, family, friends, neighbors, strangers, and eventually would-be enemies, to fill the limitless expanse. Unfortunately, by twisting self-abnegation into self-loathing, by creating a bizarre hierarchy of values that exalts pharisaical form over substance, by perpetuating the myth of an infallible gerontocracy, by creating and then attacking perceived enemies under the cloak of committees to strengthen the Saints, by ultimately becoming an end in itself rather than a means to an end, and in a thousand other ways large and small, the Church often

impedes rather than conduces to such love.

STEPHEN C. CLARK
New York City

FAMILY VALUES

I AM AMAZED that the fictional story "Prodigy" (SUNSTONE 16:2) left me so cold, nauseated, and sick at heart. I am even more amazed to think that I am protesting, in writing no less, the spiritual emptiness of a fictional character; perhaps it too has the "Murphy Brown" dimensions.

At any rate, the awfulness of its spiritual implications are akin to the unexpected appearance of a serpent or an unbidden glance of pornographic material. Electrifying, yes, but it leaves a sickening, unclean feeling in its aftermath.

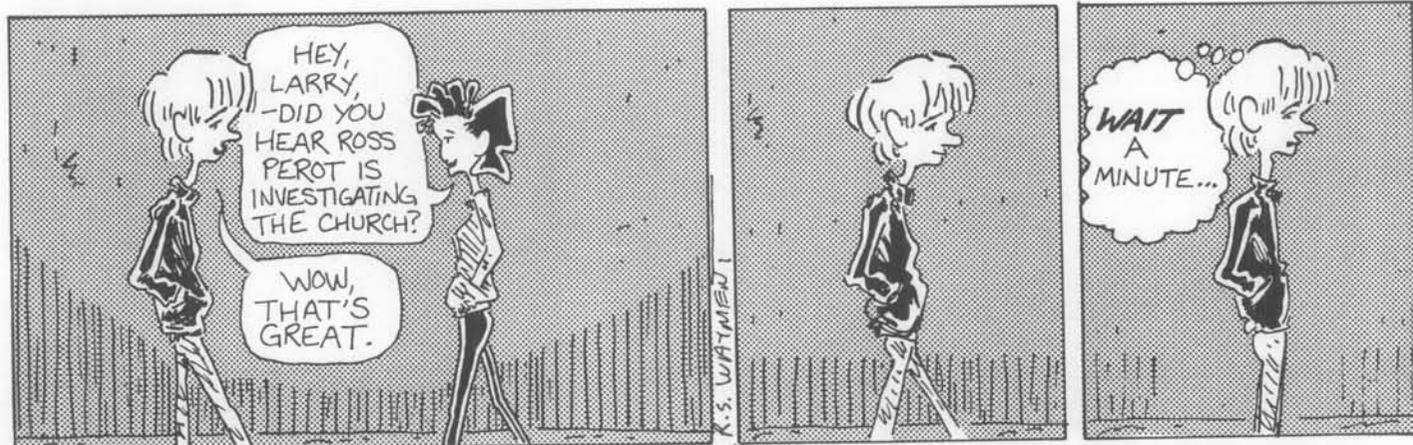
I am protesting only one character in the story. The antics of a foolish and even a very wicked young girl can be understood and pardoned. Obviously she has never read the Book of Mormon. But the shallow uncertainty of a father who had just risen from a prayerful encounter with the book itself is another matter. I defy any knowledgeable reader who has had a more-than-casual bash with the Book of Mormon and, even more especially, a prayerful experience to thereafter successfully refute the authenticity and divinity of the book.

MAX RAMMELL
Rexburg, ID

THE BOOK OF MALAY

FOR OVER a century we have searched the Americas for the Book of Mormon peoples. We have found little (if any) evidence. Perhaps it is time to look somewhere else.

But where? Mormon's general description of the land suggests that they lived in a place narrow from east to west and long from north to south. From south to north the lands were



Nephi, Zarahemla, Bountiful, and Desolation. Each of these extended from the sea on the east to the sea on the west. The Lamanites lived in the southern most Land of Nephi and were unable to expand their territory. In addition, the entire country was nearly surrounded by water except for a narrow neck of land on the border of Bountiful and Desolation that led into the north country. This description suggests that the Land of Nephi was at the southern end of a north-south trending peninsula. The peninsula was sufficiently narrow at the border of Bountiful and Desolation for a person to walk from the east to the west in a day and a half (see Alma 22:27-34). In addition, it was narrow enough at the border of Nephi and Zarahemla for General Moroni to build a line of defensive outposts from the east sea to the west sea (see Alma 50:7-13).

A few crude measurements suggest the general size of the peninsula. For example, Alma and his community walked from the Land of Nephi to the Land of Zarahemla in thirteen days (Mosiah 24:20-25). If they covered fifteen miles a day, their journey would have been about 200 miles. Yet, the entire extent of the peninsula from the Land of Nephi on the south to Desolation on the north was not great enough to preclude an expedition from going and returning in a reasonable time (Mosiah 8:7-11).

Where should we look for a north-south trending peninsula (connected at the north) several tens of miles wide and several hundred miles long? Florida is a possibility, so is Baja and Kamchatka. However, the most compelling is the place the ancients called the Golden Khersonese (Golden Peninsula)—the Malay Peninsula. Consider the following:

1. When Lehi sailed east from the coast of Southern Arabia across the Indian Ocean, his first landfall would have been the Malay Peninsula, a journey of over 3000 miles, a few hundred miles more than that of Columbus or the Mayflower.

2. The peninsula is of a size commensurate with the few distances given in the book, and water completely surrounds it except for a narrow twenty-four-mile wide neck of land at the Isthmus of Kra.

3. There were large bodies of water in the Land of Bountiful (see Alma 50:29). There are still large bodies of water today—Thale Luang and Thale Sap Saugkhla.

4. The Kalantan river system runs north from the central peninsular highlands and empties into the eastern sea. Anciently they called it Sidon.

5. The Jaredites lived in the Land of Desolation, north of the narrow passage. The Nephites held them in awe because they had tamed the elephant (Ether 9:19). To this day the countries to the north of Kra—Burma and Thailand—use the elephant in their national crests.

6. Mormon refers to the south as up and north as down (the Lamanite attacks always came down from the south). This had nothing to do with the elevation of the land, but with the orientation of their maps. The Nephites drew their maps with the south at the top, the same way other ancient Asian cultures drew their maps.

7. The Lamanites had two favorite attack routes—one down the eastern sea shore and the other down the Sidon River valley into the heart of Nephite territory. Why not down the western sea shore? The east coast of the peninsula is smooth and easily traveled, but the west coast is broken with many inlets.

8. Hagath built his ships at the border of Bountiful and Desolation and launched them into the western sea (see Alma 63:4-6). Why west? At the Isthmus of Kra is an estuary about a mile wide, and ten miles long that leads into the west sea, a perfect place for Hagath to build and launch his ships.

9. Archaeologists identify two waves of immigration into the peninsula—the Proto-Malays about 2500 B.C. and the Deutero-Malays about 3000 B.C. If the Deutero-Malays can be associated with the Mulekite-Nephite-Lamanite peoples, then the Polynesians are the true Lamanites of today.

10. Living in the Golden Khersonese the Nephites were not isolated from the Old World, as we generally assume. Consider:

A. Mormon tells us that in the first century B.C. the Nephites were building synagogues after the manner of the Jews (see Alma 16:13). The Jewish synagogue did not arise until after their return from exile—long after Lehi had left Jerusalem. How did the Nephites know how the Jews built synagogues? Being widely traveled and greatly dispersed, the Jews were living among them. The Nephites saw how synagogues were built.

B. That Jesus' teachings in 3 Nephi so closely parallels those in Matthew has led to criticism of the Book of Mormon. I suggest a copy of Matthew's work came into Mormon's hands, who, in turn, used it.

C. Lastly, I suggest that the Magi were Nephites. The Nephites knew what the star meant; they knew where to find the new King; and it would have taken them about one year to make the journey.

What does all this mean? If people are interested in finding the ruins of old Zarahemla, they might try looking along the west bank of the Kalantan somewhere in the vicinity of the present village of Daborg.

MAYLIN DITTMORE
Brentwood, CA

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