

The Welsh, the Vikings, and the Lost Tribes of Israel on the Northern Plains: The Legend of the White Mandan

JAMES D. MCLAIRD

From the earliest European discoveries, rumors of "white Indians" have circulated in America. Always to the west of settled areas, there were supposed to be people who possessed advanced customs and technology, unlike the "uncivilized savages" the frontiersmen had already met and fought. Sometimes these claims were buttressed by "eyewitness accounts" of meetings with bearded, light-skinned Indians, some of whom possessed Bibles.¹ While such curious tales plainly fascinated settlers, political significance was often attached to them as well. John Dee and

1. Bernard DeVoto, *The Course of Empire* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1952), pp. 68-73, 470-71, contains a good discussion of rumors and "evidence" of reported "white Indians" assumed to be descendants of "Prince Madoc of Wales," who supposedly came to America in A.D. 1170. A detailed listing of meetings between frontiersmen and "white Indians" is included in Zella Armstrong's uncritical account of the Madoc theory entitled *Who Discovered America?: The Amazing Story of Madoc* (Chattanooga, Tenn.: Lookout Publishing Co., 1950). She mentions remnants of an old tattered book among the Indians (p. 122). Another account of the Madoc legend by an advocate of the theory is Richard Deacon's *Madoc and the Discovery of America: Some New Light on an Old Controversy* (New York: George Braziller, 1966), pp. 108-23, 151-63. David Williams, "John Evans' Strange Journey: Part I. The Welsh Indians," *American Historical Review* 54 (Jan. 1949): 277-95, notes that

Richard Hakluyt, promoters of English colonization who wrote extensively in the late sixteenth century, claimed that a medieval Welsh adventurer named Madoc had sailed west with colonists and had perhaps settled in America; if his descendants could be found, England would have a right of discovery prior to that of Spain and could claim America as its own.² Whether from simple curiosity or political desire, the stories of such white Indians persisted, even though they were regularly proved incorrect when contact was made with the tribe rumored to have been of non-Indian ancestry. Always, just to the west, there was another tribe, and word had it that among them were to be found the fabled white Indians.

As the western horizon moved to the Great Plains region in the 1700s, the legends of white Indians persisted. The Assiniboiné in Canada had given Pierre Gaultier de Varennes de la Vérendrye information about white Indians living to the west, and one of the purposes for his expedition to the northern plains in 1738 was to learn more about these strange people known as the Mandan.³ With great anticipation and curiosity, he finally reached their villages. Ever since, proponents of the non-Indian origins of the Mandans have utilized the French explorer's startling observations about these people and their villages.

La Vérendrye described the village he visited as a fort "built on a height in open prairie, with a ditch more than fifteen feet deep and fifteen to eighteen feet wide," which could be entered only by use of "steps . . . or timbers, . . . which are removed when there is danger from the enemy," making it "impregnable against

proponents of the theory "were not troubled by any considerations as to how Madoc could have taken a 'book' to America three hundred years before the invention of printing, or how he had become possessed of a version of the scriptures in Welsh four hundred years before the translation of the Bible into that language" (p. 285). Williams traces the origin of the Welsh Indian theory to one Morgan Jones, who claimed in 1868 that Welsh-speaking Indians had saved him from execution by Tuscarora Indians. This story, Williams claims, became the "basis of all subsequent theories about the existence of Welsh Indians" (p. 284).

2. DeVoto, *Course of Empire*, p. 68; Gwyn A. Williams, *Madoc: The Making of a Myth* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1979), pp. 39-42. David Williams, "Evans' Strange Journey: Part I," pp. 282-83, briefly traces the earliest writings about the Madoc legend, but Gwyn Williams's book contains the most thorough examination of the Madoc story.

3. G. Hubert Smith, *The Explorations of the La Vérendryes in the Northern Plains, 1738-43*, ed. W. Raymond Wood (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980), pp. 27, 44, 50. DeVoto, *Course of Empire*, pp. 205-6, gives a good brief account of the rumors La Vérendrye heard from the Assiniboiné and other tribes.

Indians." He concluded that their fortifications were "not at all Indian-like." About the people, he remarked, "This nation is of mixed blood, white and black" with "fairly good-looking" women, "especially the light-complexioned ones; many of them have blond or fair hair." He added, "Most of the women do not have Indian features." He discovered that their earth lodges were "large and spacious" and "nothing is left lying about."⁴ The Mandan villages, he learned, were a trading center for the region, and the Mandan were astute diplomats and traders. In evidence of their cleverness, La Vérendrye related their treatment of the numerous Assiniboiné who had accompanied him on the journey, intending to remain at the Mandan villages to feast upon Mandan corn for an extended period. The Mandan greeted the Assiniboiné with open arms, informing them that they were welcome because a large Sioux war party was expected to attack soon and additional warriors would be valuable. The Assiniboiné hurriedly departed, not wanting any part in a war against the Sioux. The Mandan, wishing to rid themselves of unwelcome guests, had used this diplomatic ploy to encourage the Assiniboiné to leave.⁵ Although he had not found the Pacific Ocean and the Spaniards as he had hoped, La Vérendrye had discovered "white Indians," giving new life to the rumor that had circulated since the discovery of the continent and providing later writers with evidence to fuel the popular legend of the white Mandan.

Peter Kalm, a Scandinavian scientist who visited La Vérendrye in French Canada many years later, reported another curiosity the explorer had discovered. La Vérendrye related that while crossing the northern plains en route to the Mandan Indian villages (near central North Dakota), he found "a pillar of stone in which was fixed a small stone inscribed on both sides with unknown characters." Unable to decipher the inscription, he took the stone to Quebec in 1743 and "submitted the inscribed stone to the scrutiny of the Jesuit scholars there."⁶ Also unable to read

4. Ibid., pp. 59-60.

5. Ibid., pp. 51-52, 56. For an example of the use of the La Vérendrye material by an advocate of the Welsh origins theory, see Deacon, *Madoc and the Discovery of America*, pp. 114-15.

6. This version of Peter Kalm's visit with La Vérendrye is described by Hjalmar R. Holand, an advocate of non-Indian origins for the Mandan, in his book *Norse Discoveries and Explorations in America, 982-1362: Leif Erikson to the Kensington Stone* (New York: Dover Publications, 1969), p. 245. For a reprint of the scientist's 1772 account of his visit, see Peter Kalm, *Travels into North America*, trans. John R. Forster (Barre, Mass.: Imprint Society, 1972), p. 419-22.

the inscription, they suggested it might be "Tatarian" as it resembled illustrations in their books. The mysterious "Verendrye Stone" was next sent to Paris to one of the king's ministers, the Count de Maurepas, but unfortunately disappeared and, despite searches, has never been located since.⁷

Reports of white Mandans gained further support in 1832 when George Catlin, a Pennsylvania artist, journeyed westward to record the life of the Indian in paintings. Realizing that native American cultures were undergoing significant change and even facing extermination, Catlin wanted to depict their life and customs for posterity. He spent several weeks in 1832 among the Mandan and concluded that they were unique among Indian peoples. "The Mandans," wrote Catlin, "are certainly a very interesting and pleasing people in their personal appearance and manners; differing in many respects, both in looks and customs, from all other tribes which I have seen." Several unique characteristics impressed him. While they were not a warlike nation and almost never fought an offensive war, "when invaded, [they] shew their valour and courage to be equal to that of any people on earth." Small in population and surrounded by the more warlike and numerous Sioux, "they have very judiciously located themselves in a permanent village, which is strongly fortified, and ensures their preservation." Because of their system, Catlin continued, the Mandan "have advanced further in the arts of manufacture; have supplied their lodges more abundantly with the comforts, and even luxuries of life, than any Indian nation I know of," and, as a consequence, "this tribe have taken many steps ahead of other tribes in manners and refinements." Catlin concluded, "And so forcibly have I been struck with the peculiar ease and elegance of these people, together with the diversity of complexions, the various colours of their hair and eyes; the singularity of their language, and their peculiar and unaccountable customs, that I am fully convinced that they have sprung from some other origin than that of the other North American tribes, or that they are an amalgam of natives with some civilized race."⁸

The Mandan had a unique boat (today known as the bull boat), which Catlin found "altogether different from those of all other

7. Holand, *Norse Discoveries*, pp. 245-51. Holand concludes that the "Tatarian" inscription was actually a runic inscription and that the Jesuit scholars' mistaken identification was understandable since Tataric and runic inscriptions "have a remarkable superficial resemblance" (p. 248).

8. Geo[rge] Catlin, *Illustrations of the Manners, Customs and Condition of the North American Indians*, 2 vols. (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1855), 1:93.

tribes" and "exactly" like the "Welsh coracle." Also, the Mandan had "the extraordinary art of manufacturing a very beautiful and lasting kind of blue glass beads," an art he said must have been "introduced amongst them by some civilized people." Their teachers could not have been recent visitors, either, because Lewis and Clark had noticed these glass beads "thirty-three years ago, at a time when no Traders, or other white people, had been amongst the Mandans."⁹

Blond hair, light complexions, blue eyes, fortified villages, and superior manufacturing were not the only evidence Catlin found for the non-Indian origins of the Mandan. Their religious beliefs and ceremonies, he reported, included a legend about a flood and a "big canoe" and a story about a dove bringing willow leaves to it. During the Mandan O-kee-pa ceremony commemorating this flood, a man painted white walked into the village from the west to teach the people, and at the center of every Mandan village stood a symbolic big canoe. "It would seem," Catlin wrote, "from their tradition of the willow branch, and the dove, that these people must have had some proximity to some part of the civilized world."¹⁰

Tragedy struck the Mandan shortly after Catlin's visit. In 1837, the most devastating of a series of smallpox epidemics struck the upper Missouri tribes. Hearing about the epidemic in 1838 while in New York, Catlin wrote a brief account of it, relating that only thirty or forty survived. He concluded, "So have perished the friendly and hospitable Mandans; . . . and although it may be *possible* that some few individuals may yet be remaining, . . . as a nation, the Mandans are extinct."¹¹ Further study of the people and their curious customs, the artist implied, was no longer possible.

9. Ibid., 2:261.

10. Ibid., 1:178. A later and somewhat more detached account appears in George Catlin, *O-Kee-Pa: A Religious Ceremony and Other Customs of the Mandans*, Centennial ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), which includes an excellent introduction by John C. Ewers. For Catlin's complete earlier account, see Catlin, *Illustrations of the Manners, Customs and Condition*, 1:155-84. Gwyn Williams, *Madoc*, p. 12, remarked about the misinterpretation of the O-kee-pa ceremony by white visitors: "That this tradition would start white minds racing is clear. The Mandan shrine became not only a 'big canoe' but an Ark. Later still, but in a process which is impossible to date, there was a subtle shift of emphasis and the Lone Man became a White Man who, in his 'big canoe,' had brought the people across a Great Water."

11. Catlin, *Illustrations of the Manners, Customs and Condition*, 2:258. Catlin's account, from secondhand reports, erroneously says that the Arikara Indians made captives of the survivors. Both Deacon in *Madoc and the Discovery of America* and

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How could these unusual people be explained? Catlin was convinced that these "white" Indians must be descendants of Europeans who had journeyed to this region in ancient times. Unable for some reason to return to their homeland, they had mixed with the native population, producing the Mandan tribe. Catlin compiled a brief list of word comparisons and found similarities between the Welsh and Mandan languages. He speculated that the tribal name "Mandan" might be a corruption or abbreviation of "'Madawgwys,' the name applied by the Welsh to the followers of Madawc," or Madoc.¹² He concluded that they were descendants of the Welsh led by Madoc to America, a theory followed by many writers, including South Dakotan Charles DeLand who authored a lengthy study of the Mandan people in volume four of the *South Dakota Historical Collections*.¹³ According to historian Bernard DeVoto, the Madoc story "became our most elaborate historical myth and exercised a direct influence on our history."¹⁴ The story of Madoc even reached school textbooks. Samuel Eliot Morison recalled that the Madoc story "was in my first history textbook, about 1895; and I well remember teacher saying with a smile, 'Oh yes! the Mandan Indians still speak a kind of Welsh!'"¹⁵

Proponents of Welsh origins for the Mandan traced their claim to A.D. 1170 when, according to legend, Prince Madoc of Wales sailed westward, found a new land, returned home to get settlers, and then departed with several boatloads of people, never to be seen again. The story of Prince Madoc is not as commonly known today as it was earlier in American history when it circulated widely enough that many explorers searched for survivors of

Armstrong in *Who Discovered America* accept his version uncritically. For scholarly accounts of the epidemic, see Roy W. Meyer, *The Village Indians of the Upper Missouri: The Mandans, Hidatsas, and Arikaras* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1977), pp. 90-98, and Clyde D. Dollar, "The High Plains Smallpox Epidemic of 1837-38," *Western Historical Quarterly* 8 (Jan. 1977): 15-38. A vivid firsthand description appears in Annie Heloise Abel, ed., *Chardon's Journal at Fort Clark, 1834-1839* (Pierre: South Dakota State Department of History, 1932), pp. 121-39.

12. Catlin, *Illustrations of the Manners, Customs and Condition*, 2:259-61.

13. Charles E. DeLand, "The Aborigines of South Dakota: Part II, The Mandan Indians," *South Dakota Historical Collections* 4 (1908): 275-730. The last part of DeLand's account is entitled "The Claims of Welsh, or Madocian Discovery of America and Were the Mandans of Welsh Origin?" (pp. 651-726).

14. DeVoto, *Course of Empire*, p. 69. See also Gwyn Williams, *Madoc*, p. 68.

15. Samuel Eliot Morison, *The European Discovery of America: The Northern Voyages, A.D. 500-1600* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 85n.

Madoc's colonists among Indian tribes along the Atlantic coast.¹⁶ So prevalent was the notion of Welsh Indians on the frontier that when reports of light-complexioned Mandan Indians with peculiar customs circulated in the late eighteenth century, an explorer from Wales, John Evans, journeyed to the northern plains to see if the Mandan were really Welsh-speaking. He traveled in 1793 to Saint Louis, where the Spanish, suspicious of his motives, jailed him for perhaps two years. Then, thanks to the intercession of friends, Evans was released and allowed to join James Mackay's expedition in 1795. Sponsored by the Spanish, this expedition was supposed to follow the Missouri River through the Rocky Mountains and reach the Pacific Ocean. The expedition made it only as far as the Mandan villages in present-day North Dakota, but Evans was able to spend time with the tribe in 1796. Unfortunately for advocates of the theory of Welsh origins, he reported that the Mandan definitely did not speak Welsh. "In respect of the Welsh Indians," he wrote, "I have only to inform you that I could not meet with such people, and from the intercourse I have had with Indians from latitude 35 to 49 I think you may with safety inform our friends that they have no existence."¹⁷

Evans's conclusions discredited the theory of Welsh origins for the Mandan. However, in modern accounts by advocates of the Welsh theory, such as Zella Armstrong's *Who Discovered America?: The Amazing Story of Madoc* and Richard Deacon's *Madoc and The Discovery Of America*, it is Evans who was discredited. These authors claimed that Evans deliberately lied. Had he reported the Mandan to be Welsh-speaking, the Louisiana region

16. Gwyn Williams, *Madoc*, pp. 89-140, provides the most extensive examination of the Madoc story and relates its initial popularity to the growth of Welsh nationalism. Useful introductions to the topic can be found in David Williams, "John Evans' Strange Journey: Part I," pp. 277-95; DeVoto, *Course of Empire*, pp. 69-73; Morison, *European Discovery of America*, pp. 84-87; and Frederick Webb Hodge, ed., *Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico*, 2 vols. (New York: Pageant Books, 1959), 2:931-32.

17. Quoted in David Williams, "John Evans' Strange Journey: Part II. Following the Trail," *American Historical Review* 54 (Apr. 1949): 526. Gwyn Williams, *Madoc*, p. 183, gives a similar quotation from Evans. Extracts from Evans's journal are reprinted in A[braham] P. Nasatir, ed., *Before Lewis and Clark: Documents Illustrating the History of the Missouri, 1785-1804*, 2 vols. (St. Louis: St. Louis Historical Documents Foundation, 1952), 1:98-108, 2:495-99. Accounts of Evans's trip and time spent with the Mandan include Gwyn Williams, *Madoc*, pp. 141-91; David Williams, "John Evans's Strange Journey: Part II," pp. 508-29; DeVoto, *Course of Empire*, pp. 373-79; and Meyer, *Village Indians*, pp. 32-33.

could conceivably have been claimed by the English as they would have had a prior claim by discovery. Thus, concluded Armstrong and Deacon, the Spanish bribed Evans to report that the Mandan Indians were not Welsh.¹⁸ In fact, Deacon implied that the reason Evans got along well with the Mandan while visiting them was because of "some affinity between them and Evans," suggesting that the Mandan were indeed Welsh.¹⁹

In addition to claiming that the Mandan might have spoken Welsh despite Evans's report to the contrary, Deacon and Armstrong elaborated the history of Madoc's Welsh settlers. They suggested that Madoc originally landed at Mobile Bay, not far from which, they claimed, the remains of a European-style fortification still exist. Perhaps under pressure from surrounding peoples or attempting to return home, these Welsh pioneers moved northward and became the famous Mound Builders of the Ohio Valley. A great battle occurred there between the Welsh and their neighbors, according to the authors, and the Welsh were driven westward up the Missouri where they intermingled with Indian peoples and eventually became the historic Mandan.²⁰

Such theories are not without competition. Among those who have challenged the theory of the Welsh Mandan is Hjalmar Holand, who noted that the Welsh are generally brown-eyed and could hardly be considered ancestral to the blue-eyed Mandan.²¹ The descendants of Madoc's Welsh must have settled elsewhere, Holand concluded. In his opinion, the Mandan's origins must be traced instead to the Vikings! Holand authored numerous books on Viking voyages to America and became the foremost advocate of the authenticity of the Kensington Stone discovered in Minnesota in 1895.²² Chiseled into this stone were some unusual mark-

18. Deacon, *Madoc and the Discovery of America*, pp. 137-50; Armstrong, *Who Discovered America*, pp. 106-11. Morison, *European Discovery of America*, p. 106, comments: "All pro-Madoc writers try to refute Evans by attacking his character. In my opinion he was sober, honest, and objective." Deacon, p. 141, claims that Evans was "cajoled and coaxed, bullied and then flattered into becoming an agent of the Spaniards." Armstrong, pp. 108-11, emphasizes the financial motives of Evans, who received two thousand dollars for his services to the Spanish. For a careful examination of this issue, see Gwyn Williams, *Madoc*, pp. 190-91.

19. Deacon, *Madoc and the Discovery of America*, p. 146.

20. Ibid., pp. 182-219; Armstrong, *Who Discovered America*, passim.

21. Hjalmar R. Holand, *The Kensington Stone: A Study in Pre-Columbian American History* (Ephraim, Wis.: By the Author, 1932), p. 213.

22. Holand's books on this subject include: *The Kensington Stone* (1932); *Westward from Vinland: An Account of Norse Discoveries and Explorations in America, 982-1362* (New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1940), reprinted under the

ings, which were quickly discovered to be runic characters telling of a Viking journey into the Minnesota region. Holand translated the message on the stone, which today stands in a museum in Alexandria, Minnesota, as follows: "[We are] 8 Goths (Swedes) and 22 Norwegians on [an] exploration-journey from Vinland through (or across) the West (i.e., round about the West) We had camp by [a lake with] 2 skerries one days-journey north from this stone We were [out] and fished one day After we came home [we] found 10 [of our] men red with blood and dead AV[e] M[aria] Save [us] from evil [We] have 10 of (our party) by the sea to look after our ships (or ship) 14 days-journey from this island [in the] year [of our Lord] 1362"²³ Scholars attacked the authenticity of the Kensington inscription, but Holand continued throughout his life to write vigorous replies to all criticisms.

Holand's research indicated that a Viking missionary effort had been sent from Scandinavia in search and support of earlier emigrants who had settled in Greenland and Vinland. Finding no settlers in those places, the search party journeyed westward and, through a complicated river journey via Hudson's Bay, arrived in Minnesota. Reduced in numbers and unable to return home, the survivors united with a small tribe of Indians to the east of their landing site, and later generations of these "Viking-Indians" migrated to the Missouri River region. This interpretation explained, according to Holand, the Mandan religious ceremony described by Catlin in which the white man entered the village from the west as teacher. Holand discovered remarkable similarities between Mandan earth lodges and medieval Scandinavian houses. The Mandan legend of a "big canoe," he concluded, referred to the Viking boats and sea journey, and the missing Verendrye Stone was, like the Kensington Stone, runic. In corroboration of the evidence of the Kensington Stone and the documented missionary effort, Holand cited Viking axes and swords found in the region and mooring stones located where Viking ships had anchored.²⁴

title *Norse Discoveries and Explorations in America, 982-1362: Leif Erikson to the Kensington Stone* (New York: Dover Publications, 1969); *America, 1355-1364: A New Chapter in Pre-Columbian History* (New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1946); *Explorations in America before Columbus* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1956); and *A Pre-Columbian Crusade to America* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1962).

23. Holand, *Norse Discoveries & Explorations in America*, p. 101. Both brackets and parentheses are Holand's.

24. Holand, *A Pre-Columbian Crusade to America*, pp. 185-90. Holand's books generally repeat the same information.

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After Holand presented his evidence, Zella Armstrong, advocate of Welsh origins, attempted to reconcile Catlin's blue-eyed Mandan with dark-eyed Welsh ancestry by suggesting that both Viking and Welsh intermixture with the Mandan took place. Blue-eyed Mandans were descendants of the Viking explorers who had chiseled the Kensington Stone, she concluded, and the Welsh language and customs were the legacy of the earlier descendants of Madoc.²⁵ Another attempt to reconcile the Welsh and Viking theories appeared in a popular magazine, *Real West*, in 1966. The author, Gene Jones, cited a recently discovered map at Yale University that predated Columbus's 1492 voyage and showed the eastern coast of North America as proof that the Mandan were descendants of the Vikings. It seemed evident to the author that the Vikings had mapped the eastern coast and consequently must have made the journey to Minnesota. Jones concluded that since the Vikings had earlier conquered Wales, it was obvious that the Vikings, en route to the New World, had included Welsh members in their crew and that both Vikings and Welsh had ultimately mixed with the Indians to become the ancestors of the Mandan.²⁶

However, another writer traced the origins of the mysterious Mandan to the "Lost Tribes of Israel." Many earlier efforts had attempted to link all American Indians to the Lost Tribes. When America was first discovered, Europeans had been at a loss to explain the origin of the native inhabitants since traditional biblical teaching claimed a recent single origin, Adam and Eve, for all humanity. A logical deduction seemed that somehow wandering Jews had made it to the New World, and the usual interpretation centered on one or more of the Lost Tribes whom the Assyrians had taken into captivity in 723 B.C. One popular publication that advocated that Indians were "lineal descendants of the Lost Tribes of Israel" was James Adair's *History of the American Indians*, which appeared in 1775. He endeavored to prove this connection "from their religious rites, civil and martial customs, their marriages, funeral ceremonies, manners, language, traditions, and a variety of particulars."²⁷ His conclusion was sup-

25. Armstrong, *Who Discovered America*, p. 124.

26. Gene Jones, "Mandans: Pre-Columbus Descendants of the Vikings," *Real West* 9, no. 47 (May 1966): 30-32, 52-54.

27. Samuel Cole Williams, ed., *Adair's History of the American Indians* (New York: Promontory Press, n.d.), p. 15. This book is a modern reprint of James Adair, *The History of the American Indians* (London: Edward & Charles Dilly, 1775).

ported by none other than George Catlin, who believed, "with many others, that the North American Indians are a mixed people—that they have Jewish blood in their veins."²⁸

It is hardly surprising, then, that a more recent publication has followed this lead and attempted to prove that the Mandan in particular were descendants of the Lost Tribes. Henrietta Mertz's *The Nephtali: One Lost Tribe*, published in 1957, stated, "Amazingly enough, the ceremony of the Mandan, up to 1837, followed more perfectly the original Old Testament record than does that of our present day church." Her examination focused on Catlin's description of the O-kee-pa ceremony, which, she was convinced, paralleled the ritual of the Hebrews. "In the annual religious ceremony of the Mandan," she wrote, "a re-dedication took place—fulfilling to the utmost the sacred vow given by Moses—so incredibly faithful to Biblical description that it defies belief."²⁹ Mertz claimed other similarities. For example, she suggested that the Court of the Dwelling described in the book of Exodus resembles a drawing of a Mandan ceremonial lodge. In her opinion, the Mandan flood story, clothing, "bundle rites," and language all indicate Hebrew origins. Mertz also considered it more than coincidence that one of the subgroups of the Mandan was called the Nuptadi, a word bearing close resemblance to Nephtali, one of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel.³⁰

Scholars reject all these theories, both old and new, of Mandan origins and conclude that there was nothing mysterious about this tribe of Indians. Most academic studies concerned with the tribe, therefore, ignore the ever-popular speculation about Mandan origins, causing it to appear that the authors are unaware of the proponents' evidence.³¹ Such lack of attention, however, is due to the fact that scholars can easily discredit the explanations and "evidence" in support of non-Indian origins for the Mandan because of the advocates' poor methodology and misuse of sources. Nevertheless, popular speculation about the white Man-

28. Catlin, *Illustrations of the Manners, Customs and Condition*, 2:231.

29. Henriette Mertz, *The Nephtali: One Lost Tribe* (Chicago: By the Author, 1957), p. 15.

30. *Ibid.*, pp. 91-103.

31. While the white Mandan legend has been attacked in some books and articles (e.g., DeVoto and Morison as cited above), more often scholars have simply ignored the persistent speculation about non-Indian origins of the Mandan. For example, see Alfred W. Bowers, *Mandan Social and Ceremonial Organization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1950) and Meyer's excellent *Village Indians of the Upper Missouri*.

dan persists, and an examination of the reasons for its rejection by scholars is warranted.

One consistent problem in the published arguments of proponents of non-Indian origins for the Mandan is the selectiveness of their evidence. Advocates use only those sources that support their thesis, ignoring significant documents that do not agree with their claims. They employ the journals of La Vérendrye and Catlin almost exclusively.³² John Evans, the Welshman who attacked the Welsh origins hypothesis, is also discussed in these accounts, for his opponents dare not omit his directly conflicting testimony, but his conclusions are always discredited. However, many additional travelers visited the Mandan during the early historic period and either did not mention white Indians or, as Evans did, advocated Indian origins for the Mandan. Indeed, even another visitor of Welsh background, David Thompson, was at the Mandan villages in 1797.

Thompson, an important figure in the exploration of Canada, made no mention in his journal of white Indians or unusual customs, despite the fact that his time had "been spent in noticing their Manners and conversing about their Policy, Wars, Country, Traditions, &c &c in the Evenings I attended their Amusements of Dancing Singing &c. which were always conducted with the highest order and Decorum . . . after their Idea of thinking."³³ Among other Canadian traders who visited the Mandan and re-

32. See Armstrong, *Who Discovered America*, pp. 105, 109-22, for example.

33. W. Raymond Wood and Thomas D. Thiessen, eds., *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains: Canadian Traders among the Mandan and Hidatsa Indians, 1738-1818, the Narratives of John Macdonell, David Thompson, Francois-Antoine Larocque, and Charles McKenzie* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), pp. 93-128; the quotation appears on p. 117. Deacon, *Madoc and the Discovery of America*, p. 213, does mention David Thompson, attacking his credibility by suggesting that he did not know Welsh and must not have known about the Madoc story, "otherwise he would surely have confirmed or rejected the reports. He did neither." But Thompson did, Deacon says, conclude that the Mandan were a "fair-skinned race with many European characteristics." What David Thompson actually said about the Mandan was: "Both Men and Women are of a stature fully equal to Europeans; and as fair as our french canadians; their eyes of a dark hazel, the hair of dark brown, or black, but not coarse; prominent nose, cheek bones moderate, teeth mouth chin good; well limbed; they are a handsome people" (Richard Glover, ed., *David Thompson's Narrative, 1784-1812*, Publications of the Champlain Society, no. 40 [Toronto, 1962], p. 176). Although the word "fair" in this passage could be construed to mean "fair-skinned," there is nothing in the description to indicate that Thompson showed surprise at what he observed; his account clearly indicates that he was describing the village and inhabitants of an Indian nation.

corded their experiences without mentioning anything unusual were John Macdonell, Francois-Antoine Larocque, and Charles McKenzie.³⁴ Most importantly, in 1804-1805 Meriwether Lewis and William Clark wintered with the Mandan and observed their life and culture on a daily basis, mentioning nothing unusual in their journals. Charles DeLand, an advocate of the Welsh theory, openly expressed his disappointment with these two highly respected explorers, complaining that they did not use their golden opportunity to observe the white Mandan while residing with them. It evidently did not occur to DeLand that Lewis and Clark found nothing to report in that respect.³⁵

Lewis and Clark's failure to observe that the Mandan were Welsh, or white, was not due to any unfamiliarity on their part with the Madoc story. In fact, when they met the Flathead in the Rocky Mountains, the explorers were surprised at the tribe's unique language, and Lewis began compiling a vocabulary. Bernard DeVoto commented, "For that moment the expedition was on the rainbow edge of fantasy: this language might be Welsh and these people, 'light complected more So than Common for Indians,' might be descendants of Prince Madoc."³⁶ Lewis and Clark quickly abandoned the fantasy, but the fact that they even considered the Flathead as the Welsh descendants after having lived near the Mandan for many months makes the absence in their notes of anything unique about the Mandan even more conclusive.

The Mandan villages received many other important visitors after Lewis and Clark. Henry Brackenridge, who traveled up the Missouri River in 1811, was familiar with the theory of non-Indian origins and commented on the ruins of previous villages along the river, noting, "Many, without considering the astonishing number and variety of these remains, have attributed them to a colony of Welsh, or Danes, who are supposed to have found their way

34. Wood and Thiessen, *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains*, contains the journals of these men. The book also provides a useful listing of seventy visits by fur traders from the north to the Mandan and Hidatsa villages between 1738 and 1818 (pp. 298-321).

35. Gary E. Moulton, ed., *The Journals of the Lewis & Clark Expedition, Volume 3: August 25, 1804-April 6, 1805* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), pp. 203-332, 402-3; DeLand, "Mandan Indians," pp. 346-47. For an excellent discussion of Lewis and Clark's visit with the Mandan, see James P. Ronda, *Lewis and Clark among the Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), pp. 67-132.

36. DeVoto, *Course of Empire*, p. 502.

by some accident to this country, about the ninth century." Brackenridge concluded, "It is absolutely impossible that they could have gained such a footing as these vestiges indicate, without at the same time, leaving others less equivocal." He found no unequivocal evidence of non-Indian origins, leading him to state, "That no Welsh nation exists at present on this continent, is beyond a doubt."³⁷

Brackenridge, aware that perceived similarities in European and Mandan customs and material culture had led other travelers to opposite conclusions, was of the opinion that the Mandan had derived their culture independently: "In tracing the origin of institutions or inventions amongst men, we are apt to forget, that nations, however diversified by manners and languages, are yet of the same species, and that the same institutions may originate amongst twenty different people." The customs and culture that he observed, which others had cited as proof of non-Indian origins, convinced Brackenridge only "that the American tribes belong to the human race." In fact, he suggested, the real surprise would be if "they should not shew a resemblance."³⁸

In 1833, the year after Catlin's sojourn among the Mandan, Maximilian, Prince of Wied, made a scientific excursion to the upper Missouri and stopped at the Mandan villages. He thought little of Catlin's Welsh Indian theory and stated that he observed no evidence of non-Indian traits that might have come into being prior to the eighteenth century. In a strong statement of disagreement, Maximilian concluded "that some have affirmed that they have found, in North America, Indians who spoke the Gaelic language; this has been said of the Mandans; but it has long been ascertained that this notion is unfounded, as well as the assertion that the Mandans had a fairer complexion than the other Indians."³⁹

Similarly, Rudolph Kurz, a Swiss artist who resided at Fort Clark in 1851, was highly critical of Catlin's observations that the

37. Henry Marie Brackenridge, *Views of Louisiana, Together with a Journal of a Voyage up the Missouri River, in 1811* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1962), pp. 182-83. This book is a facsimile reprint of the original 1814 Pittsburgh publication.

38. *Ibid.*, pp. 189-90.

39. Maximilian, Prince of Wied, *Travels in the Interior of North America, in the Years 1832, 1833, and 1834* (1843), reprinted in *Early Western Travels, 1748-1846*, ed. Reuben Gold Thwaites, vols. 22-24 (Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1906), 23:366. The pertinence of this passage has also been noted by Marshall T. Newman, "The Blond Mandan: A Critical Review of an Old Problem," *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 6 (Autumn 1950): 262.

Mandan were of Welsh origins. Kurz observed: "What Catlin calls blonde hair among the Mandan is nothing more than sun-burned hair that is not continually smeared with grease. . . . I may mention, also, that the lighter color of some Indians' skin (not only Mandan) is easily traced to the 'whites.'"⁴⁰ Proponents of the Welsh origins theory do not cite Kurz's journal of his 1851 trip to the Mandan villages; some of them even claim that "George Catlin was the last white man to have had any close contacts with the Mandans."⁴¹ Kurz's detailed narrative proves that that statement is simply not true.

In addition to not utilizing all the relevant sources, advocates of non-Indian origins for the Mandan do not use all the relevant information in the sources they do cite. While proponents consistently cite portions of the La Vérendrye writings, they ignore any conflicting evidence within those same writings. In his 1738 journal reporting his trip to the Mandan villages, for example, La Vérendrye wrote: "I admit that I was surprised, having expected to see a people different from other Indians, especially in view of the account we had been given. They [the Mantannes] are not at all different from the Assiniboins; they go naked, covered only with a buffalo robe carelessly worn without a breechcloth. I knew by this time that we would have to discount everything we had been told about them."⁴² When the explorer confronted the Assiniboine "for having lied to me about the Mantannes," they said they had been describing a different people much farther down the river. Their descriptions indicated that they were probably referring to the distant settlements of the Spanish.⁴³ In another example, proponent Zella Armstrong cited Maximilian to describe the Mandan villages but omitted his dismissal of Catlin's Welsh origins theory.⁴⁴

Since advocates of non-Indian origins for the Mandan thus avoid some sources and pick and choose from others, they fail to sample and compare enough of the relevant information to enable them to analyze their chosen evidence carefully. As an illustra-

40. Myrtis Jarrell, trans., *Journal of Rudolph Friederich Kurz: An Account of His Experiences among Fur Traders and American Indians on the Mississippi and the Upper Missouri Rivers during the Years 1846 to 1852*, ed. J. N. B. Hewitt, Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin no. 115 (Washington, D.C., 1937), p. 100.

41. Deacon, *Madoc and the Discovery of America*, p. 214.

42. Smith, *Explorations of the La Vérendryes*, p. 51 (brackets in original).

43. *Ibid.*, p. 64.

44. Armstrong, *Who Discovered America*, p. 123.

tion, consider the puzzling hair color of the Mandan. On 1 August 1851, Kurz wrote in his journal that while he sketched, a fourteen-year-old Mandan girl attracted "my notice more than the others, because her hair is entirely gray, and with her young, pretty face gives her an extraordinary appearance." Kurz further observed, "Gray hair is said to be quite general among the Mandan—a sort of family misfortune, not due to severe illnesses."⁴⁵ A more complete examination of Catlin's remarks on the Mandan Indians reveals that he also observed a similar condition. Wrote Catlin, "In complexion, colour of hair, and eyes, they generally bore a family resemblance to the rest of the American tribes, but there were exceptions, constituting perhaps one-fifth or one-sixth part of the tribe, whose complexions were nearly white, with hair of a silvery-grey from childhood to old age, their eyes light blue, their faces oval, devoid of the salient angles so strongly characterizing all other American tribes, and owing, unquestioningly, to the infusion of some foreign stock."⁴⁶

According to physical anthropologist Marshall T. Newman, Catlin and Kurz were both describing a kind of achromotrichia, or premature graying, a genetic trait. Newman has examined contemporary evidence carefully and discovered that this genetic trait existed in several Indian tribes, including the Mandan, and it caused streaks of blondness and premature graying of the hair. "In fact," wrote Newman, "most of the eye-witness reports indicated that it tended to run in families and seemed to affect both sexes equally."⁴⁷ He noted that Catlin discovered in his survey that premature graying occurred in about one in ten to one in twelve members of the Mandan tribe. Thus, it appears that, at least as far as hair color is concerned, part of the mystery of the white Mandan can be solved through comparison and analysis of the eyewitness accounts.

Many visitors to the Mandan substantiated Catlin's observations and support Newman's conclusions. Alexander Henry, a fur trader of the Northwest Company, journeyed to the Mandan villages in 1806 and described the condition clearly: "What struck me as extraordinary among these people was several children

45. Jarrell, *Journal of Rudolph Friederich Kurz*, p. 88. Interestingly, Kurz mentions that Pierre Gareau, the interpreter at the fort, called the gray-haired girl, "the blonde" (p. 96).

46. Catlin, *O-Kee-Pa*, p. 43.

47. Newman, "Blond Mandan," p. 264.

about ten years of age, whose hair was perfectly gray, and who thus resembled aged persons; those I saw were all girls. These people in general have not such strong coarse hair as other natives of North America; they have it much finer, rather inclining to a dark brown, and I observed some whose hair was almost fair."⁴⁸ With the concept of premature graying in mind, it is also instructive to reexamine La Vérendrye's observation concerning "mixed races." Newman suggested that La Vérendrye's description of the Mandan as "mixed blood, white and black" might refer to hair colors, not complexion or race.⁴⁹ With the references to light hair color by Catlin and La Vérendrye explained as achromotrichia, an important portion of the proponents' argument for the non-Indian origins of the Mandan can be dismissed.

Likewise, a comparative examination of the La Vérendrye and Catlin comments that the Mandan were fair skinned, more handsome than other tribes, and unique in language will lead to the conclusion that too much value cannot be placed on such observations. Visitors typically commented that given Indian peoples were all of those things. Here again, advocates of non-Indian origins are guilty of not utilizing enough of the available sources and evaluating the evidence accordingly. Francois-Antoine Larocque, in his journal of his 1806 trip to the Yellowstone River region, said of the Crow Indians, "Such of them as do not make practice of exposing themselves naked to the sun have a skin nearly as white as that of white people. . . . most of those Indians, as they do not so often go naked, are generally of a fairer skin than most of the other tribes with which I am acquainted." He also stated that the Crow "seldom go to war, or to steal horses but defend themselves with courage when attacked," foreshadowing Catlin's similar observation about the Mandan. Larocque's remarks are particularly significant because he had earlier visited the Mandan and was familiar enough with them to make comparisons between the two tribes. While he compared the running ability of the Mandan and the Crow, he did not mention the Mandan in his discussion of skin color.⁵⁰

48. Elliott Coues, ed., *New Light on the Early History of the Greater Northwest: The Manuscript Journals of Alexander Henry and of David Thompson, 1799-1814*, 3 vols. (New York: Francis P. Harper, 1897), 1:341.

49. Newman, "Blond Mandan," p. 260.

50. Wood and Thiessen, *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains*, pp. 206-7, 213. The journal cited here was kept during "an Excursion of Discovery to the Rocky Mountains by Mr. Larocque in the Year 1805."

In similar fashion, Brackenridge wrote of the Arikara, whom he visited in 1811, "The men are large and well proportioned, complexion somewhat fairer than Indians commonly are. . . . The women are much fairer than the men; some might be considered handsome any where."⁵¹ Of the Cheyenne, he wrote that they "are a wandering nation, on the heads of the Chienne river. Trade with the Arikaras — speak a different language from any nation I know. Their complexion very fair. They trade also with the Spaniards, and have a great number of horses, &c."⁵² Comparison of comments like these to those of Catlin and La Vérendrye leads the discerning researcher to the conclusion that most tribes were probably perceived, by one explorer or another, as having some unique features that set them apart or made them seem peculiar.

In addition to hair color and complexion, La Vérendrye and Catlin discussed cultural differences, stating or implying that the Mandan dwellings, religious practices, or customs were different from those of other Indians they had encountered. La Vérendrye's surprise about the Mandan earth lodges is not remarkable, however, for he came to the plains from the northeast and had not previously encountered earth-lodge dwellers. Had he journeyed up the Missouri River instead and visited the Pawnee or Arikara first, he might have found the Mandan villages less singular. But what of house and boat construction, language, religious rituals, and legends that seemed similar to those in the Old World? As Brackenridge noted in 1811, such comparisons need to be made carefully, for some similarities only prove that all people are members of the human race.

In making these comparisons, it is important to compare the Mandan to their neighbors as well as to the Welsh, Vikings, or Hebrews. When considering languages, for example, Catlin made a list of Mandan words similar, he believed, in sound and meaning to Welsh words. He was not a linguist, nor did he speak Welsh, and he did not make a careful linguistic comparison of Mandan and other Indian languages.⁵³ Samuel Eliot Morison noted: "There is extensive literature on travelers discovering American Indians who were fluent in some European or Asiatic language.

51. Brackenridge, *Views of Louisiana*, pp. 252-53.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 77.

53. Catlin, *Illustrations of the Manners, Customs and Condition*, 2:261. While Catlin did collect similar phrases from various tribes, he did not attempt to analyze similarities or differences among them.

Uneducated travelers were apt to regard every Indian language as gibberish, and so compared it with some known language such as Welsh, Basque, Hebrew, or Finnish, that was also gibberish to them." Morison called Catlin's efforts at proving his linguistic theory a "phony comparative vocabulary."⁵⁴ A thorough study of the Mandan language by linguists has proven that it is a Siouan language. Comparative studies of Mandan culture have also revealed that the Mandan shared customs and material culture with neighboring village peoples and that the continuity of their culture is traceable for centuries.⁵⁵

Such studies, however, have not deterred the proponents of the non-Indian origins theory. Henriette Mertz saw great similarities in the ceremonies of the Mandan and the Hebrew, but her outline of similarities ingeniously omitted most of the Mandan ceremony. By selecting only particular aspects, Mertz was able to disregard the torture and sexual aspects of the Indian ritual.⁵⁶ The O-kee-pa ceremony of the Mandan was, in part, the initiation of young men into manhood, and it included the placing into the skin of skewers to which buffalo skulls were attached as weights; the young men hung with the weights tearing their skin. "I shudder at the relation, or even at the thought of these barbarous and cruel scenes, and am almost ready to shrink from the task of reciting them," wrote Catlin. "I entered the *medicine-house* . . . as I would have entered a church; . . . little did I expect to see the interior of their holy temple turned into a *slaughter-house*, and its floor strewn with the blood of its fanatic devotees." Catlin continued that it was "truly shocking to behold, and will almost stag-

54. Morison, *European Discovery of America*, p. 106.

55. W. Raymond Wood, *River Basin Surveys Papers: No. 39—An Interpretation of Mandan Culture History*, Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin no. 198 (Washington, D.C., 1967), pp. 11-12; Meyer, *Village Indians*, pp. 6-12; Waldo R. Wedel, *Prehistoric Man on the Great Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961), pp. 161-62. Hodge, *Handbook of American Indians*, 2:931-32, notes, "It seems hardly necessary to state that there is not a provable trace of Welsh, Gaelic, or any other European language in any native American language, excepting for a few words of recent introduction which have had no effect whatever on the general structure or vocabulary." Referring to the so-called Welsh Indians, he adds, "The extension of linguistic investigation has left no resting place on the entire continent for this mythic people" (p. 932). Armstrong, *Who Discovered America*, p. 129, attacked the classification of Mandan as a Siouan language, writing, "Thus they rate the name of their bitterest enemies, who tried to destroy them."

56. Mertz, *Nephtali*, p. 15.

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ger the belief of the world when they read of it. The scene is too terrible and too revolting to be seen or to be told."⁵⁷ Is this what Mertz considered to be "incredibly faithful to Biblical description"? A thorough examination of Mandan creation stories, of torture as a part of their religious ceremony, and of the orgiastic features of the O-kee-pa ceremony uncovers little similarity to Christian or Hebraic traditions.⁵⁸

Zella Armstrong's *Who Discovered America* compared the Mandan bull boat to the Welsh coracle. Using Catlin's description, she claimed, "They fished in a boat which was unlike any used by other Indian tribes in America" and "exactly like the coracle used in Wales and . . . operated in the same manner."⁵⁹ Obviously, the use of the bull boat by other village tribes in the northern plains region was unknown to her. Rudolph Kurz, writing in his journal on 19 August 1851, commented that he "made a drawing of the inner construction of a skin boat." He continued, "Catlin tries to prove from the similarity of these boats to the Irish coracle that the Mandan derive their origin from Madoc's colony." Kurz scoffed at this theory. "All Indians who dwell on the prairies," he wrote, "make use of skin boats on account of the scarcity of wood." Like a modern scholar, Kurz concluded that "such conclusions, based purely on analogies, are questionable."⁶⁰

Advocates of the non-Indian origins for the Mandan make much use of supposedly corroborative evidence. Welsh proponents mention ancient Mound Builders and their fortifications and Welsh legends. Viking advocates rely on a missing Verendrye Stone with "Tataric writing," the Kensington Stone, and Viking-style axes and swords discovered in the region. None of the corroborative evidence is reliable. Robert Silverburg's study on the Mound Builders, subtitled *The Archaeology of a Myth*, disposed well of any arguments that the Mound Builders were other than Indians.⁶¹ Erik Wahlgren and Theodore Blegen discredited the Kensington Stone inscription and proved it to be a fraud, and Vi-

57. Catlin, *Illustrations of the Manners, Customs and Condition*, 1:155-57.

58. For example, see the thorough descriptions of Mandan legends and ceremonies in Bowers, *Mandan Social and Ceremonial Organization*. For comparison with other tribes, see Charles McKenzie's description of a Hidatsa ceremony that bears a resemblance to the Mandan O-kee-pa ceremony in Wood and Thiessen, *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains*, pp. 252-57.

59. Armstrong, *Who Discovered America*, p. 112.

60. Jarrell, *Journal of Rudolph Friederich Kurz*, p. 100.

61. Robert Silverburg, *Mound Builders of Ancient America: The Archaeology of a Myth* (Greenwich, Conn.: New York Graphic Society, 1968).

king implements have not been discovered in situations that indicate that they came to America prior to modern times.⁶² Runologists found words in the Kensington inscription not in use in 1362 when it was supposedly written, and one scholar pronounced it "a childish fraud . . . made by a farmer who lacked the most elementary knowledge of medieval Scandinavian."⁶³ Viking halberds found in Minnesota were discovered to be tobacco cutters manufactured in the United States, and battle-axes "were premiums given to collectors of labels from Battle-Axe Plug, a popular chewing tobacco around the turn of the century."⁶⁴ David Williams effectively demonstrated the lack of any contemporary basis to the 1170 Madoc legend, showing that the first mention of Madoc in Welsh sources appears in a 1440 poem, and it does not mention any expedition to America.⁶⁵ Another Welsh scholar, Gwyn Williams, noted that the Madoc story first appeared in print in 1583 "in a pamphlet written by an Englishman to promote a British colonization of America."⁶⁶ Archaeologists and anthropologists have traced the background of the Mandan through an evolution in culture from village site to village site and have found no sudden cultural change caused by prehistoric non-Indian peoples.⁶⁷

There had, however, been white admixture with the Mandan, and it took place fifty or more years before Catlin visited the tribe. Resident fur traders lived in the Mandan villages as early as 1776, and "most of these men had native wives and children in

62. Erik Wahlgren, *The Kensington Stone: A Mystery Solved* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1958); Theodore C. Blegen, *The Kensington Rune Stone: New Light on an Old Riddle* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1968). For an excellent brief review of the arguments and literature against the stone's authenticity, see Morison, *European Discovery of America*, pp. 75-79. Morison comments, "Common sense should have dismissed this as a hoax," but despite evidence to the contrary, "the controversy shows no sign of abating after creating a bibliography of hundreds of items" (p. 76). Blegen, the most cautious of the scholars in his approach, also concludes, "The inscription is a fake" (p. 123).

63. Erik Moltke, "The Ghost of the Kensington Stone," *Scandinavian Studies* 25 (1953): 9, quoted in Morison, *European Discovery of America*, p. 76.

64. Morison, *European Discovery of America*, p. 77.

65. David Williams, "John Evans' Strange Journey: Part I," pp. 281-82.

66. Gwyn Williams, *Madoc*, p. 35 (emphasis in original). Pages 35-67 of this book offer the most complete examination of the emergence of the Madoc story in Europe.

67. Wood, *Interpretation of Mandan Culture History*, pp. 3-4; Meyer, *Village Indians*, pp. 6-12.

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the villages."⁶⁸ Marshall Newman noted that, beginning in 1784, "the Mandan villages were the gateway to the upper Missouri fur trade. As the competition between the rival companies heightened, the number of White visitors increased."⁶⁹ Regular visits by whites led to Indian-white mixture. Many visitors attested to the extensive sexual contact. David Thompson wrote in 1797: "The curse of the Mandanes is an almost total want of chastity: this, the men with me knew, and I found it was almost their sole motive for their journey hereto: The goods they brought, they sold at 50 to 60 p^r cent above what they cost; and reserving enough to pay their debts, and buy some corn; [they] spent the rest on Women."⁷⁰ Lewis and Clark observed the same behavior, commenting that some of their party had contracted venereal disease, "which is common with the Indians and have been communicated to many of our party at this place" as "those favors" were "easily acquired."⁷¹ Alexander Henry echoed this testimony in his 1806 journal, writing, "The men make no scruple in offering their wives to strangers without solicitation, and are offended if their favors are not accepted."⁷²

This Mandan behavior related to the people's concept of power. To them, it was critical that the buffalo appear each year, and in religious ceremonies, the wives of young men were offered to the old and distinguished men, who were called "buffalo" and thought to have power. When whites arrived, they too were seen as powerful, and the passing of their power through sexual relations with women of the tribe was considered important, even if visitors misunderstood the activity.⁷³ It is thus likely that admixture, whether through marriage and/or ceremonial relations, began as

68. Wood and Thiessen make this point in their essay, "History of the Fur Trade," in *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains*, p. 42. They also discuss and list some of the resident fur traders who lived with the Mandan and Hidatsa Indians beginning as early as 1776 (pp. 42-47).

69. Newman, "Blond Mandan," p. 258.

70. Glover, *David Thompson's Narrative*, p. 177 (brackets in original). Later on the same trip, Thompson also remarked, "They have a handsome cleanly race of women, who do all they can to heighten the voluptuousness [sic] of Love, and as they have little else to do, they seem to have succeeded" (David Thompson's Journal, in Wood and Thiessen, *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains*, p. 117).

71. Moulton, *Journals of the Lewis & Clark Expedition*, 3:322. See also Ronda, *Lewis and Clark among the Indians*, pp. 106-7.

72. Coues, *New Light on the Early History of the Greater Northwest*, 1:342.

73. John Ewers, Introduction to Catlin, *O-Kee-Pa*, p. 8; Ronda, *Lewis and Clark among the Indians*, p. 107.

early as the visit by the La Vérendrye party in 1738 and increased when fur traders and explorers made more regular journeys to the Mandan villages at the end of the century. Marshall Newman concluded "that by the time of Lewis and Clark's visit (1804-05) considerable intermixture probably had taken place," and by the 1830s when Catlin traveled to the Mandan, "there probably had been enough interbreeding to form a mixed-breed group of one or two generations' standing." Newman further noted that because of population decline caused by several smallpox epidemics and warfare with the Sioux, the impact of regular intermixture with white visitors was probably more pronounced than it might otherwise have been.⁷⁴ Catlin's finding of light-complexioned and light-eyed Mandan becomes less and less remarkable or mysterious in the light of the evidence supporting continual intermixing in the forty years prior to his visit.

In contrast to this historic admixture within a declining population, the genetic impact of small parties of any prehistoric Welsh, Vikings, or Israelites would not have been lasting, according to Newman. While estimates of prehistoric Mandan population would be guesswork, any European whites (such as the twenty surviving Scandinavians of the Kensington inscription) would be grossly outnumbered. "From a genetic standpoint," Newman pointed out, "this numerical inferiority would be hard to overcome, even if the Europeans combined unusual longevity with great procreative abilities." The ratio of non-Indians to Indians would be small, and several centuries of intermixture would "weigh heavily against the chances of a few Europeans making a genetic impression still visible after more than 400 years."⁷⁵ The explanations of historic admixture, racial variations, and controlled exposure to the sun can explain the reported light complexion of the Mandan without the need to search for an improbable and nearly impossible solution that defies logic.

One final reason that prevents serious scholars from accepting the conclusions of advocates of non-Indian origins for the Mandan is the proponents' tendency to exaggerate beyond what the evidence will support and otherwise be careless in their use of sources. While George Catlin believed in the Welsh ancestry of the Mandan, his zealous followers have distorted his already slanted observations even further. Zella Armstrong's *Who Dis-*

74. Newman, "Blond Mandan," p. 259.

75. *Ibid.*, p. 268.

covered America, for example, presented the following description of the Mandan. After noting briefly some of the evidence against the Welsh Indian theory, she claimed that, nevertheless, "it is said by some historians that six hundred years after the discovery [of America] and the landing of the [Madoc] expeditions on the coast, there lived, hundreds of miles from that coast, in the Missouri River country, a people who were different from the Indians surrounding them. They wore clothes. They were almost white, many of them. Some of them spoke and understood the Welsh language. They carried skin-wrapped parchments which they could not read. They said, some of them, that they remembered that their ancestors had come a long way to reach that country and over a great water. They were called the Mandans."⁷⁶ While Armstrong claimed that she based her story on Catlin and other visitors to the Mandan, which one of those sources could support the suggestion, for instance, that the Mandan had written parchments?

Sloppiness in the use of sources is also seen in Armstrong's statement that Maximilian was "the next visitor after Sieur de la Verendrye" to visit the Mandan.⁷⁷ Richard Deacon followed her error and elaborated on it. "The next visitor to the Mandans after the Sieur de la Verendrye," he said, "was Maximilian, another French explorer and friend of Verendrye." In reality, La Vérendrye visited the Mandan in 1738, and Maximilian in 1833, ninety-five years later; Maximilian was not a French explorer; and obviously the two men were not acquaintances. Deacon also reported on the same page that La Vérendrye "felt sure that they must have some trace of European ancestry as one of the Mandans wore a cross and spoke the names of Jesus and Mary."⁷⁸ Here, he appears to have badly misconstrued a secondary source he was using, a book entitled *Explorers of the New World* by Katherine and John Bakeless, which apparently related the fact that La Vérendrye, as he departed the Mandan villages, left two men behind to learn the language. In a related book, John Bakeless clearly stated that these two men, when they later rejoined La Vérendrye, told him that they "had talked with strange Indians who had come overland from Spanish territory, with still more detailed descriptions of the white men there. . . . One of these

76. Armstrong, *Who Discovered America*, p. 105.

77. *Ibid.*, p. 123.

78. Deacon, *Madoc and the Discovery of America*, p. 115. See also p. 251n.8.

strange Indians wore a cross and 'pronounced often in talking to them the names of Jesus and Mary.'"⁷⁹ As Bakeless clearly knew, this Indian was not a Mandan but was a visitor to the Mandan, and the Spanish were the source of his Christian symbol and words.

Deacon continued to compound the error. "Catlin," he claimed, "was especially interested in the fact that La Verendrye had come across one male Mandan who wore a cross and spoke the names of Jesus and Mary."⁸⁰ He cited no source for this statement. In fact, Catlin's account indicated that he did not know about La Vérendrye's journey. "Their traditions," wrote the artist of the Mandan, "so far as I have yet learned them, afford us no information of their having had any knowledge of white men before the visit of Lewis and Clarke, made to their village thirty-three years ago."⁸¹

Another significant error appeared in the Deacon and Armstrong accounts when they attempted to establish the basis on which to evaluate the veracity of Catlin as compared to John Evans. Deacon wrote: "Only a man who was prepared to spend a long time studying every detail of their lives and talking with them could expect to acquire any worthwhile information on the subject. This is what Catlin did. Whereas John Evans spent only six months among the Mandans, Catlin lived with them for eight years."⁸² In fact, Catlin spent only about three weeks at the Mandan villages, from about 22 July to sometime between 5 and 14 August 1832.⁸³ Clearly, such carelessness in the use of historical records does not lend credibility to the accounts written in support of non-Indian origins for the Mandan.

Robert Wauchope, in *Lost Tribes & Sunken Continents: Myth and Method in the Study of American Indians* (1962), discovered a regularity in the methods of the advocates of unique origins for American Indians. Whether discussing the lost continent of Atlantis, the Lost Tribes of Israel, or the ancestry of the Mandan, he noted, "the typical advocate of the 'wild' theories of American

79. John Bakeless, *The Eyes of Discovery: The Pageant of North America as seen by the First Explorers* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1950), pp. 170-71.

80. Deacon, *Madoc and the Discovery of America*, p. 215.

81. Catlin, *Illustrations of the Manners, Customs and Condition*, 1:94.

82. Deacon, *Madoc and the Discovery of America*, p. 214. Armstrong, *Who Discovered America*, p. 110, appears to have been Deacon's source.

83. Ewers, Introduction to Catlin, *O-Kee-Pa*, pp. 13-15.

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Indian origins begins his book with the underdog appeal; he points out that he has been personally scorned, ridiculed, or at best snubbed by the professionals." He then "predicts that his writings will in turn be ill received or ignored, and he proceeds to attack the thickheaded bigotry of the men in universities and museums. Frequently he implies that they are not only hopelessly conservative and jealous of any scholarly inroads by amateurs but also that they are actually dishonest, and when confronted with conflicting evidence they will suppress or if necessary destroy it."⁸⁴ More recently, Brian Fagan commented, "To read the crank literature on the first Americans is to enter a fantasy world of strange, often obsessed, writers with a complex jargon of catchwords and 'scientific' data to support their ideas."⁸⁵ These observations seem true of the accounts by proponents of non-Indian origins for the Mandan.

Deacon attacked professional scholars frequently: "History, not unnaturally, tends to be written by historians, but seldom by geographers, or seamen, or interpreters of legend, and much of the early history of the world has suffered in consequence." He also attacked ethnologists: "Modern ethnological research does not help much because it is too rigid and precise in its approach and ignores all evidence which does not fit into its tabulated tribal categories, like, for example, the Bureau of Ethnology's historically inaccurate description of the Mandans as a Siouan tribe. Alas, there is no adequate history of many Indian tribes to enable the theories of science to be checked with the chronology of facts." He decried a perceived lack of any serious attempt by archaeologists to use modern methods of dating Mandan sites: "With the Mandans now virtually extinct, it is almost impossible to believe that any further evidence will be produced, unless some systematic attempt is made at excavations in certain areas where their camps or forts are known to have been sited."⁸⁶ Yet, his bibliography listed no serious archaeological studies of the Mandan. Deacon also dismissed the work of physical anthropologist Marshall Newman, claiming: "What is of most importance is

84. Robert Wauchope, *Lost Tribes & Sunken Continents: Myth and Method in the Study of American Indians* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), pp. 81-82.

85. Brian M. Fagan, *The Great Journey: The Peopling of Ancient America* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1987), p. 10.

86. Deacon, *Madoc and the Discovery of America*, pp. 234, 237.

the evidence of men who lived in an era when reports of Welsh Indians could still be assessed. Historians who had heard this evidence either first hand or second hand were better able to pass judgement" than modern historians.⁸⁷ Why this would be true is not clear. What is clear, however, is Deacon's judgement that all scholars who discredited the Welsh theory are close-minded or otherwise ineffective.

The same pattern can be seen in the work of Hjalmar Holand, whose methodology has been critically examined by Erik Wahlgren. Wahlgren concluded that Holand was not a reliable or objective investigator. Holand attacked all who disagreed with him, and "his insistent aim is merely to prove the genuineness of the unfortunate Kensington document."⁸⁸ Wahlgren noted a humorous example of Holand's internal inconsistencies. Writing about the discovery of the Kensington Stone by Olof Ohman, a Minnesota farmer, Holand related that the question naturally arose whether the inscription might be a forgery: "There was in any case the question of opportunity. The stone was found in plain view of Nils Flaten's house, and as it was too heavy to be carried, the inscription must have been chiselled on the spot where it was found. But any such 'forger' would certainly have been seen by Flaten who had lived there since 1884. And what could have been the motive for such a laborious forgery? Completely mystified, Olof Ohman hauled home his stone and dumped it down by the granary door."⁸⁹ As Wahlgren noted, "the major idiosyncrasy of the stone was that it could be hauled in only *one* direction."⁹⁰

By omitting the reports of most visitors to the Mandan villages, by not citing evidence indicating gray-streaking in the hair, by not discussing the considerable white admixture that took place after La Vérendrye's visit, by utilizing corroborative evidence of disputable validity, and by exaggerating and misquoting their sources, the advocates of non-Indian origins for the Mandan have developed a case that scholars can easily dispute. Why, then, despite the flimsy evidence on which the theory of the white Mandan is based, do these arguments persist? One factor

87. *Ibid.*, p. 161.

88. Wahlgren, *Kensington Stone*, p. 88.

89. Holand, *Explorations*, p. 165, quoted in Wahlgren, *Kensington Stone*, pp. 95-96.

90. Wahlgren, *Kensington Stone*, p. 96.

must certainly be simple curiosity. The mysterious is always attractive. Martin Gardner in his *Fads and Fallacies in the Name of Science* commented about the fascination people have had for theories of "sunken continents" such as Atlantis and Mu. "The psychological factors," he remarked, "behind all this are not hard to understand. There is, of course, an obvious element of escape in dreaming about a vast, mythical land of wonder." Gardner also emphasized that these writers experience a sense of being special, of having been "initiated into great mysteries hidden from the eyes of the common multitude."⁹¹

Brian M. Fagan in *The Great Journey: The Peopling of Ancient America* also commented on these "myth-makers" who first appeared in colonial America when the origins of the American Indians had not yet been determined. Fagan concluded that "every variety of mystic, crackpot, and religious cultist" joined the search, and while "such wild theorizing would not be surprising in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when so little was known of American Indian society," it is surprising that these conjectures have persisted into the twentieth century. "However, as so often happens," continued Fagan, "many people have now changed these theories into articles of faith, into pseudo-scientific dogma that brooks no opposition. The Phoenicians, who never ventured this far from the Mediterranean, and the lost continent of Atlantis are alive and well in twentieth-century America!"⁹² And, it might be added, the white Mandan are with us yet, too.

"Why do such lunatic ravings persist?" asked Fagan. Racism and ethnocentrism certainly play a part for some advocates who assume "that American Indians were incapable of much more than the simplest of tasks."⁹³ Certainly, that factor is evident in the theories of the white Mandan supporters. The literature clearly indicates that the search for non-Indian origins began because it was obvious to the given writers that Indians were unable to pursue peace, build orderly villages and fortifications, and engage in sophisticated diplomacy and trade.

Hjalmar Holand, speaking of Mandan earth lodges, was certain that the Mandan could not be of Indian origin because "it is of

91. Martin Gardner, *Fads and Fallacies in the Name of Science* (New York: Dover Publications, 1957), p. 171.

92. Fagan, *Great Journey*, p. 9.

93. *Ibid.*

course possible that a tribe of Indians could develop a radically different type of habitation from that of other representatives of their race, but it is not probable." He supported the theory that the Viking survivors mixed with the Indians, and "though small in numbers this community by reason of the intelligence and experience of their white leaders were able to defend themselves so well against recurring attacks of their ancient enemies, that they eventually became a numerous people well entrenched in many fortified towns."⁹⁴ Holand's ethnocentrism is most apparent in his comments that the Vikings, "because of their superior intelligence and ability, would rise to positions of importance in the tribe and leave some evidence of their presence and influence behind them." What is not so apparent is how the Mandan could have received their "peaceful disposition," which made their villages "an oasis of comfort and gentleness in a desert of savage and warring Indians," from Viking leadership.⁹⁵

Advocates of the white Mandan theory have not been careful in attempting to prove their case. Rather than allowing the evidence to suggest conclusions, they have sought only the evidence that supports their previously formulated ideas. Nevertheless, such writings remain popular and need to be seen for what they are. In 1811, Brackenridge, while sitting in the Mandan villages, penned a humorous, but fitting, conclusion to this study of the theory of non-Indian origins for the Mandan and the methodology of its proponents. "In the evening" he wrote, the Mandan "usually collect on the tops of the lodges, where they sit and converse: every now and then the attention of all was attracted by some old men who rose up and declaimed aloud, so as to be heard over the whole village. There was something in this like a quaker meeting. Adair labors to prove the Indian tribes to be descended from the Jews, I might here adduce this as an argument in favor of these people being a colony of quakers."⁹⁶

94. Holand, *Norse Discoveries*, pp. 279, 284-85.

95. *Ibid.*, pp. 263-64.

96. Brackenridge, *Views of Louisiana*, p. 251.

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