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Paul R. Cheesman, ed., assisted by S. Kent Brown and Charles D. Tate, Jr., *The Book of Mormon: The Keystone Scripture*

Lavina Fielding Anderson

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Title

Author(s) Lavina Fielding Anderson

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Abstract Review of *The Book of Mormon: The Keystone Scripture* (1988), edited by Paul R. Cheesman and assisted by S. Kent Brown and Charles D. Tate Jr.

Paul R. Cheesman, ed., assisted by S. Kent Brown and Charles D. Tate, Jr., *The Book of Mormon: The Keystone Scripture*. Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1988. ix + 293 pp., indexes of subjects and scriptures. \$13.95.

Reviewed by Lavina Fielding Anderson

The title page proclaims this book as the proceedings of "the First Annual Book of Mormon Symposium," announcing the commitment of both the Religious Studies Center and Brigham Young University to have an annual symposium on this "keystone" scripture. This symposium was held in September 1985, and to date four have been held; the proceedings of two are now in print, and the third and fourth should appear this year.

This book of papers offers fifteen presentations by authors, many of whom are well known to students of Mormonism. They include: Daniel H. Ludlow, "The Challenge of the Book of Mormon"; Robert J. Matthews, "What the Book of Mormon Tells Us about Jesus Christ"; Robert L. Millet, "The Ministry of the Father and the Son"; Joseph F. McConkie, "A Comparison of Book of Mormon, Bible, and Traditional Teachings on the Doctrines of Salvation"; Kent P. Jackson, "The Beginnings of Christianity in the Book of Mormon"; Rodney Turner, "The Three Nephite Churches of Christ"; Stephen D. Ricks, "Fasting in the Book of Mormon and the Bible"; Larry E. Dahl, "Faith, Hope, and Charity"; Gayle O. Brown, "Love in the Book of Mormon"; George F. Carter, "Before Columbus"; Norman Totten, "Categories of Evidences for Old World Contacts with Ancient America"; Paul R. Cheesman, "Cultural Parallels between the Old World and the New World"; James R. Christianson, "The Bering Strait and American Indian Origins"; George A. Horton, Jr., "Book of Mormon—Transmission from Translator to Printed Text"; and Susan Easton Black, "Lest Ye Become as the Nephites of Old."

As is clear from these titles, topics range from thematic analyses of culture and doctrine within the book itself, the history of its coming forth, and examinations of the broader ancient context in which the Book of Mormon was created. All of the presentations seem to have been created with the interested layperson in mind and are admirably clear and well documented.

No doubt future symposia will also include more specialized materials.

Two papers I found most absorbing were the diffusionist presentations of Carter and Totten—also the only two among the presenters who were not BYU faculty members. Carter, of Texas A&M, reported the absorbing narrative of his own research into transoceanic transmission of such biological items as cotton, the sweet potato (“botanically and linguistically it is clear that it has been carried out of America probably three times, and at least two of these are pre-Columbian,” p. 169), chickens, maize (“maize of a type formerly grown on the coast of Peru, but having long disappeared from that region before 1500, is one of the kinds ... found in the interior of China,” p. 171), and other plants, including the pineapple, which appears in a mural at Pompeii.

Totten, who is part Choctaw, launched an energetic and well-documented attack on isolationism which, he accuses, “sometimes results in not reporting or even worse in hiding evidence which supports opposing views” (p. 189). He then catalogues twenty items of evidence of both trans-Pacific and trans-Atlantic contact that were fascinating in both their range and their specificity. As diffusionists, Carter and Totten are not in the majority of American anthropologists and archaeologists, but their vivid research raises worthy challenges to traditional views of American origins.

Christianson’s careful and even-handed analysis of the Bering Strait hypothesis for the peopling of the North America was also interesting. Ludlow’s analysis of the major claims for the Book of Mormon (p. 4) provides a solid foundation not only for his own analysis of the major themes but also for the several doctrinally focused studies of his colleagues. I particularly enjoyed Dahl’s analysis of “Faith, Hope, and Charity,” and Brown’s essay on love.

For many readers, the diversity of approaches in this book and the universal accessibility of discussion will be enlightening, refreshing, and a stimulus to personal studies—no doubt the intent of the symposium’s organizers and participants. If the promise of the title page holds true, other equally handsomely designed volumes will make welcome additions to personal libraries.