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Abstract Review of *Light from the Dust: A Photographic Exploration into the Ancient World of the Book of Mormon* (1993), by Scot Facer Proctor and Maurine Jensen Proctor.

Scot Facer Proctor and Maurine Jensen Proctor, *Light from the Dust: A Photographic Exploration into the Ancient World of the Book of Mormon*. Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1993. xi + 194 pp. \$39.95.

Reviewed by Fred W. Nelson

The subtitle of the book, "A Photographic Exploration into the Ancient World of the Book of Mormon" states what the authors hoped the book would be. The photographs the Proctors have published are excellent and show scenes of the area around Jerusalem, the coastal border area of Yemen and Oman, and southern Mesoamerica. About one-fourth of the book contains photographs of the Jerusalem, Yemen, and Oman areas that the authors believe to be the area traveled by Lehi and his party and where they built the ship as they prepared to come to the promised land. Three-fourths of the book contains photographs of the Mesoamerican area thought by the authors to be the area of the Book of Mormon in the New World. The photography is excellent. Beautiful landscapes are shown along with details of flowers, artifacts, and some specific archaeological sites. Unfortunately the photographs are much better than the figure captions and the text.

The text consists of a narration and commentary which uses many Book of Mormon scriptures to make it flow. There is usually no correlation between the text and the photographs. This is frustrating. One reads the text and looks at the photographs and wonders why the photograph is near that particular text or vice versa.

The same is true for the captions to the photographs. The first sentence in the caption usually identifies the photograph. Then there follows a statement the authors have written or quoted that is not related to the photograph nor to the closest text. The following is an example:

Common food of the Bedouin since ancient times are these rock-hard Jamid, which are made from a mixture of herbs, meadow grasses, and camel's or goat's cheese. The mixture is placed in a skin bag, then kneaded and dried on the tent roof in the hot sun. Concerning a teaching of Joseph Smith, Erastus Snow said that Ishmael's "sons married into Lehi's family." Marrying cousins is a Near Eastern custom that survives to this day. It is poignant that Lehi and Sariah were anxious to bring Ishmael's family into the wilderness. Their own daughters would have been in that group. (caption, p. 22)

The second half of the caption has no relation to the first half, and none of it relates to the nearby text. Other examples:

Clouds capture evening light in Chiapas, Mexico. It is poignant that Nephi made the small plates thirty years after leaving Jerusalem. As he wrote, he had already lost his parents, was separated from his older brothers, was living in a new land, and was nearly fifty. Surely his feelings were deep as he abridged the experiences of the past thirty years. (caption, p. 86, for the photograph on pp. 84–85)

Illuminated jungle ferns at a Guatemalan nature preserve. The constant and faithful prayers of Alma the elder for his son are telling of the efficacy of prayer. "He has prayed with much faith concerning thee," the angel said to Alma the younger about his father. (caption, p. 103)

Bright morning sunlight bursts through trees at Izapa near Tapachula, Mexico. One can learn a great deal here about the plan of salvation, including the nature of death, resurrection, and the knowledge of a pre-mortal existence. When the Lord comes, the Jews will look upon Him and say, "What are these wounds in thine hands and in thy feet?" (caption, p. 169)

According to the authors, F. Richard Hauck was their archaeological advisor. Hauck spent three weeks with the Proctors of the six weeks they were in Mesoamerica taking photographs.

The photographs, text, and captions reflect this influence. Hauck's ideas regarding Book of Mormon geography have been published and reviewed and found wanting.¹ Notwithstanding Hauck's involvement, the book contains errors in archaeology. For example, it is interesting that so many photographs of Mixco Viejo were published since most archaeologists believe it was established during Late Classic times (A.D. 600–800)² and its defensive works date to Early Postclassic times (A.D. 1000–1200)³ long after the Book of Mormon period. The caption on page 111 for the photograph on pages 108–9 states that the Temple of the Cross at Palenque is a Postclassic temple and that Palenque is in Tabasco, Mexico. But Palenque is in Chiapas, as is correctly stated in the caption on page 66, and the Temple of the Cross dates to Late Classic times. The caption for the photograph on page 89 states: "Stela of Mayan warrior-leader Pacal located at Palenque in the state of Chiapas in Southern Mexico." This figure is not a stela. It does not represent Pacal, according to Merle Greene Robertson.⁴ The caption on page 138 (for the photo on page 139) states that "The Comitán River valley in southern Mexico is one of the ancient travel corridors to the Pacific," when in fact the Comitán River valley is in southern Guatemala and empties into the Gulf of Honduras in the Caribbean Sea and not into the Pacific Ocean. An interesting example is found in the caption on page 141 which reads in part, "Trees generally grow only on one side of these trenches today." The authors then show a trench with trees growing on both sides.

¹F. Richard Hauck, *Deciphering the Geography of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988); John Clark, "A Key for Evaluating Nephite Geographies," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon*, 1 (1989): 20–70; and William Hamblin, "A Stumble Forward?" *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon*, 1 (1989): 71–77.

²Stephen F. De Borhegyi, "Settlement Patterns of the Guatemalan Highlands," in *The Handbook of Middle American Indians* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1965), 2:70.

³Stephen F. De Borhegyi, "Archaeological Synthesis of the Guatemalan Highlands," in *The Handbook of Middle American Indians*, 2:43.

⁴Merle Greene Robertson, *The Sculpture of Palenque*, vol. 3 of *The Late Buildings of the Palace* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1985), 67, 68, 69; illustrations 333a, 333b, 326a, 326b, 332.

In addition to factual errors, there are some interpretations that seem poor at best. For example, the caption on page 152 identifies the site of Nueve Cerros (Nine Hills) as possibly Zarahemla. This does not follow the theories of the majority of Book of Mormon scholars. In addition, the authors make the assumption that the major industry of Zarahemla might have been salt production, an assertion that has no basis in the scriptures and, in fact, is misleading in a book such as this. There is a photograph of Lake Atitlan in Guatemala with a caption (p. 166) that identifies the lake, gives a brief description of the Aztec calendar, and then relates them both to Book of Mormon scriptures—associating two things far apart geographically and 1000 years apart chronologically. I know of no basis for the statement in the caption on page 172 (for the photograph on pages 170–71) that the mound complex at Izapa, near Tapachula, Mexico, “is an exact model of the Temple of Solomon but in grander proportions.” The above statements and others like them detract from the value of the photographs published in this book.

In summary, the photographs of what many consider to be the Book of Mormon area in the New World and the land of Bountiful in the Old World are excellent and should be interesting to many who have not had the privilege of seeing these areas in person. However, it seems to the reviewer that the authors would have had a much better book if they had just published the photographs with a brief statement of identification. They never say why a particular photograph was published nor what its importance is to the stated theme of the book. The text and a portion of each caption do not relate to the photographs. Neither text nor captions add anything to Book of Mormon scholarship, and both contain errors and dubious interpretations.