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**Title** Earnestly Seeking

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**Abstract** *Review of Recent Book of Mormon Developments: Articles from the Zarahemla Record*, vol. 2 (1992), edited by Raymond C. Treat.

**Raymond C. Treat, ed. *Recent Book of Mormon Developments: Articles from the Zarahemla Record, vol. 2. Independence, MO: Zarahemla Research Foundation, 1992. 228 pp., with index. \$12.00.***

Reviewed by Alison V. P. Coutts

### **Earnestly Seeking**

Perhaps the most important impression made by this compilation of articles in the Zarahemla Record—an RLDS publication—is that the authors have a deep respect and love for the Book of Mormon and are earnestly striving for understanding. The problem with their manner of doing this is that all too often understanding is presented as a product of thought and inspiration, and the reader is urged to accept the interpretation as definitive. This would be acceptable if these revelatory statements had some kind of substantiating scholarship; unfortunately, however, the tendency is for the author to expound his or her thoughts and then treat them as the view to be accepted for all further discussion on the subject, leaving little or no room for counterarguments.

The Preface starts the trend of sweeping statements by declaring that “the Book of Mormon was not named after the man Mormon but after the land of Mormon where the covenant was restored through the ministry of Alma” (p. v). David Lamb’s article “The Meaning of the Name ‘Mormon’ ” (p. 44–45) sheds light on this somewhat startling pronouncement, and we see that this is a personal opinion, extrapolated from Mormon’s declaration that he was named after the land of Mormon (Mormon 1:6).<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the land of Mormon is synonymous with the restoration of the covenant; therefore, the Book of Mormon is really the Book of the Restoration of the Covenant (p. 45).

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<sup>1</sup> This is an RLDS scripture notation; the LDS Book of Mormon reference is 3 Nephi 5:12.

This cleared up another query arising from the preface which mentions the same alternative appellation and leads to an article by Raymond Treat himself on "Covenants: Key to the Restoration of the House of Israel" (p. 52). By now this scan through the book was turning into something of a treasure hunt, but the nature of the treasure was still somewhat obscure, since notations such as "my mind was quickened" (p. 44) and "the Lord has recently given us a new and powerful insight" (p. 52) lead the reader to feel inadequate if personal spiritual confirmation is not forthcoming.

These two articles share the section "Hebrew Nature" with some observations from firmer ground by Angela Crowell on the "Midrash: Ancient Jewish Interpretation and Commentary" (pp. 27-30). The use of Hebrew poetry is also examined,<sup>2</sup> and of course no discussion of the Hebrew nature of the Book of Mormon would be complete without some examples of chiasm (pp. 40, 56). However, comprehensive references are rare and personal opinion seems to be prevalent.

Royal Skousen's current work on the Critical Edition of the Book of Mormon<sup>3</sup> is cited in the next section dealing with the differences in the manuscripts of the Book of Mormon, notably the Original and Printer's editions, and those subsequently printed by the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. This section contains some interesting findings and is well referenced. Obviously a great amount of time and effort went into this research.

Sections on Archaeology and Geography follow, again causing mixed reactions. The articles essentially parallel work done by John Sorenson and others, without referring to that work. Credibility is however lost in an article by Sherrie D. Smith entitled "Jade: Stones of Light" (pp. 125-27). Theories concerning the Jaredite stones are manifold and Smith admits in an Author's Note that the "ideas . . . presented here are at best my present feeling and knowledge." However, the article itself contains such

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<sup>2</sup> Edward L Faunce, "Is the Book of Mormon Written in an Ancient Hebraic Poetic Style?" 32-33. Angela M. Crowell, "Hebrew Poetry in the Book of Mormon," 12-26.

<sup>3</sup> Royal Skousen, "Towards a Critical Edition of the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 30/1 (1990): 42-69.

statements as “Either the brother of Jared melted the jade to free it from the rock . . . or he actually melted one rock and poured the liquid jade into sixteen molds” (p. 126). Again we have the admonition to “prayerful research and study to discover modifications (to those things I’ve presented),” suggesting that an alternative is perhaps not to be sought.

The final sections, Testimony and Insights, are the “Mormon Journal” and “Random Sampler” sections of this book. J. Robert Farley has drawn an overview of the Book of Mormon and the paintings featured are quite striking.<sup>4</sup> He relates his experiences in “Discovering God’s Will in My Life,” (pp. 153–56). The article in the Insight section, “More ‘No Erasers’ in the Book of Mormon” by Dennis Heater (pp. 197–200) deals with the problems of writing (and not being able to erase) on brass plates and is an amusing insight.

These final sections, offering homilies and suggestions for direction of study, confirm the feeling that the writers of this volume are earnest seekers after truth. However, as most of their insights and research cover subjects that have been better and more extensively researched and published by Latter-day Saint scholars in general and FARMS in particular, I do not feel that this publication adds greatly to our present resources.

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<sup>4</sup> See the review by Larry K. Smith in this issue of the *Overview of the Book of Mormon*.