



1-31-2001

A Reader's Library

Martin H. Raish

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jbms>

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Raish, Martin H. (2001) "A Reader's Library," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*: Vol. 10 : No. 1 , Article 14.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jbms/vol10/iss1/14>

This Notes and Communications is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Book of Mormon Studies by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.



NEAL A. MAXWELL INSTITUTE
FOR RELIGIOUS SCHOLARSHIP

BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY • PROVO, UTAH

Title A Reader's Library

Author(s) Martin Raish

Reference *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 10/1 (2001): 72-74.

ISSN 1065-9366 (print), 2168-3158 (online)

Abstract This article lists and discusses multiple texts that comment on the Book of Mormon and recommends them as supplements to Book of Mormon study.



A READER'S LIBRARY

Martin Raish

The first essay for this department reviewed Bible dictionaries and atlases, and the second essay examined similar works about the New World that could help illuminate the background and settings of the Book of Mormon. Now it is time to turn our attention to works specifically about this sacred record.

First, however, I must take care of a few housekeeping chores.

Updates. In the first review I recommended the *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*. It is still my preference, but it now has a strong competitor, a revision (really a total revamping) of an excellent older dictionary. *Eerdmans' Dictionary of the Bible*, edited by David Noel Freedman (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000), is about as comprehensive as a one-volume work can be. With approximately 5,000 entries written by nearly 600 experts, it packs a tremendous amount of up-to-date information into fewer than 1,500 pages. It offers a balanced, fair-minded overview of recent archaeological discoveries and current insights from literary, historical, theological, sociological, and other approaches to Bible scholarship. Its major weakness is its relative paucity of illustrations, only about 100, in addition to a 12-page section of color photos.

In the second review I mentioned the imminent appearance of the third volume in Joyce Kelly's series of travel guides to ancient Mexico. This work, *An Archaeological Guide to Central and Southern Mexico*, was delayed but is now definitely scheduled to be published this fall by the University of Oklahoma Press.

Other New Books. The Harold B. Lee Library at Brigham Young University recently received its copy of the new *Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). It is an impressive work—a large-format, three-volume set (more than 1,800 pages) packed with learned essays on virtually every topic imaginable about ancient Egypt, all written by eminent scholars and skillfully edited into a cohesive whole. Its \$450 price tag will probably keep it from your personal library shelves, but most academic libraries (as well as larger public ones) should have a set. Check it out. The set has a very small selection of color photographs, all contained in one section in volume 2, but there are plenty of black-and-white photos, drawings, maps, and so forth.

I have been waiting even more anxiously for another new book from Oxford University Press, *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Meso-*

american Cultures: The Civilizations of Mexico and Central America. The book was originally due to come out in fall 2000, but it was delayed. Keep your eyes open for it in your local library. I hope to cover it in my next review.

Change of Emphasis. With this review I must retreat a bit from my previous focus on reference books. There simply are not many reference books for the Book of Mormon. More important, however, are many related works that have become for me “standard works” or “best books.” It is on these that this and subsequent essays will concentrate.

At the same time I will continue to restrict my reviews insofar as possible to books that are both in print and available at affordable prices, straying only when my enthusiasm for new titles overtakes me (as with the two Oxford encyclopedias described above) or when an item is worth tracking down in the used-book market.

Caveat. I am struck by the fact that most of the items in this essay (and probably subsequent ones as well) are published by FARMS, the same people who produce this journal. Furthermore, one of the books I review is written by the journal's editor, John L. Sorenson. Could this be

perceived as a conflict of interest? If so, my defense is simple: FARMS has published a great number of excellent books about the Book of Mormon. Their catalog is packed with outstanding items, and although other publishers produce notable works in the field of Book of Mormon studies, none equals the total output (especially in terms of overall quality) of FARMS.

This essay includes a mixed group of materials whose only common thread is that each has nourished my appreciation for the amazing breadth and depth of the Book of Mormon—as scripture, as history, as literature, and as a personally inspiring and profoundly moving work—without becoming overly concerned with any particular aspect of the book. Two of these publications are reference works, one is a photo essay, two are compilations of research reports, and one is a 30-page essay. None is particularly profound, and none is seminal in that it contains the best or most complete coverage of any particular idea. Yet each is a unique and rich mine of facts, ideas, and often images (both visual and verbal) that can create a solid foundation for further study.

I had hoped to begin with a review of a new encyclopedia of the Book of Mormon that has been under development for several years, but it has not yet appeared. The publisher (Deseret Book) hopes to have *The Book of Mormon Companion* available by late this year or early 2002. Keep your eyes open for it.

The only similar work now in print is *To All the World: The Book of Mormon Articles from the Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, selected by

Daniel H. Ludlow, S. Kent Brown, and John W. Welch (FARMS, 2000). This book reprints from the original four-volume set all the entries that deal with “the contents, peoples, teachings, and coming forth of the Book of Mormon.” All appear as originally written, except for some minor corrections and a few additional bibliographic sources.

The editors have also provided a list of entries arranged according to five categories—people in the Book of Mormon, books of the Book of Mormon, studies of the Book of Mormon, teachings from the Book of Mormon, and the coming forth of the Book of Mormon—as well as a list of all scriptural passages mentioned in the articles. If you do not already own the original encyclopedia, this inexpensive paperback abridgment would make a valuable addition to your library.

A volume of similar size and shape but of a quite different nature is *Charting the Book of Mormon: Visual Aids for Personal Study and Teaching*, by John W. Welch and J. Gregory Welch (FARMS, 1999). The book contains 177 “charts” that summarize key ideas and present other useful information in concise, easy-to-grasp form. Some are quotations in decorative frames and some are maps, while others are chronological or genealogical diagrams and lists of people, words, or ideas. The charts cover topics such as the structure of the Book of Mormon; money, law, war, and other cultural features mentioned in the record; and considerations of its teachings and messages.

Are you confused by the editorial comments inserted into the

record by Mormon? Chart 20 will help. Would you like a good summary of the teachings of Korihor? See chart 78. Do you want to compare Lehi’s dream with Nephi’s vision? Check out chart 92. Charts 128 through 133 offer good examples of chiasmus, and chart 134 discusses the occurrences of the phrase *It came to pass*. (Did you know the phrase does not appear at all in the book of Moroni?) Charts 150 and 151 list all geographic names mentioned in the Book of Mormon, both alphabetically and by scriptural reference.

Each chart is printed on a full 8½-by-11-inch page to afford easy copying for classroom use. Accompanying each chart are explanatory text and, where appropriate, key scriptural references and source information. This book is filled with an amazing amount of data, and it’s easy (and fun!) to use.

I now turn to a book entirely different from the previous two. This is *Images of Ancient America: Visualizing Book of Mormon Life*, by John L. Sorenson (Research Press/FARMS, 1998). This is a beautifully printed book filled with a balance of text and images designed to help readers “equip themselves better to picture the conditions under which the Nephites and Lamanites lived [and to] understand Mormon’s record more completely.” The book succeeds admirably in doing precisely these things.

Chapters are devoted to the land and the peoples, life’s routine, society, government, war and the military, belief and worship, knowledge systems, and arts and symbols. Almost every page contains full-color images that illustrate these various aspects of life in ancient Mesoamerica. All

of the illustrative material is accompanied by captions and other explanatory text that help the reader to link the historical and cultural settings to Book of Mormon life.

The artwork was selected not only for the cultural information it conveys—such as what Nephite houses or clothing might have looked like or what the people’s social or religious activities might have been—but also because each is a beautiful object in its own right. The sculptures, manuscript pages, jewelry, and other artifacts are among the finest available, with photographs obtained from museums and private collections around the world. Supplemented by architectural reconstructions, maps, photographs of land and people, charts and diagrams, they offer a visual feast of Book of Mormon life never before accessible in a single work.

The intent of the next two books is quite different. Not only do they have few illustrations (always disappointing for an art historian like me, although acceptable in these instances), but they have no particular focus other than to present recent research on the Book of Mormon.

For more than 15 years FARMS has issued periodic “Updates,” short reports of innovative findings and insights about the Book of Mormon written by dozens of researchers in a wide range of scholarly fields. These reports proved increasingly popular, and in 1992, and again in

1999, the best of these were republished in book form. Although some are a bit dated now and many have blossomed into larger articles or books, reading through them is still a worthwhile endeavor because they each offer another building block to our understanding of the depth, complexity, and majesty of the scriptures.

Together *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, edited by John W. Welch (Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), and *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon: The FARMS Updates of the 1990s*, edited by John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne (FARMS, 1999), reprint more than 150 Updates and other short research reports. All contain bibliographies, and many have notes directing readers to fuller presentations of the discoveries or ideas reported.

The entries in each volume are arranged in the order that the key passage or idea appears in the Book of Mormon. Thus they move from “How Long Did It Take to Translate the Book of Mormon?” (a topic related to the Book of Mormon’s title page, which declares the book to be a translation) to “Climactic Forms in the Book of Mormon” (featuring an example from Moroni 8:25–26), and from “A Note on the Name *Nephi*” (1 Nephi) to “The ‘Decapitation’ of Shiz” (Ether 15:30). The second volume also adds a few historical studies, such as “Was There a Library in Harmony, Pennsylvania?” and “The Sobering Lesson of the Grolier Codex.”

My final recommendation is a short essay by Orson Scott Card, “The Book of Mormon—Artifact or Artifice?” in *A Storyteller in Zion* (Bookcraft, 1993). Card examines whether the Book of Mormon could be a 19th-century hoax rather than an authentic ancient record. He approaches the question from the experience of an author who has tried to do similar things (that is, to create epic works of fiction) and who knows that “writing something that purports to be an artifact of another culture is the most complicated, difficult kind of science fiction” and that such “is almost never attempted under circumstances where the author actually tries to pass it off as a genuine document.”

If the book is fiction, Card writes, “we should find Joseph Smith’s or someone else’s influence there *as author*. In that case *all* of the ideas and events in the book should come out of the mind of an 1820s American.” But this is not the case. Card searched for flaws and oversights but could not find them. Instead, he found examples of language, culture, and literature that demonstrate the improbability, if not the downright impossibility, that Joseph Smith was the author rather than the translator of the Book of Mormon. These conclusions are not startling, but the way Card approached and presented them from the viewpoint of a writer rather than a scholar has left an indelible impression on me. ■■■