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The Saga of the Book of Abraham Jay M. Todd

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JAY M. TODD. *The Saga of the Book of Abraham*. Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Company, 1969. 388 pp. \$4.95.

(Reviewed by James R. Harris, assistant professor of religious education at Brigham Young University. Dr. Harris has been a teacher of the Pearl of Great Price for over ten years and has contributed to research on the background of the Book of Moses during this same period.)

A quick glance over the preface and chapters two and three of *The Saga of the Book of Abraham* may lead to the hasty decision that the reader is once again confronted with the usual rehashing of the same old, tiresome things. But, happily, such is not the case. This volume is precisely what it is purported to be: a report of "nearly" all known information that has a bearing on the background of the Book of Abraham. A more accurately, though less catchy, title may well have been *A Current Resume of the Historical Background of the Book of Abraham*. The author's style is such that even the necessary rehashing of old things is pleasantly accomplished.

The need for this volume is apparent when the offerings in the area are surveyed. The great pioneer efforts of Sidney B. Sperry in *Ancient Records Testify in Papyrus and Stone* and James R. Clark's *Story of the Pearl of Great Price* are now obsolete. Some gestures have been made of late such as *From the Dust of Decades*, by Keith Terry and Walter Whipple, but nothing to compare with the thorough treatment given to this subject by Todd. Most students of the Pearl of Great Price are exposed to only scanty chapters of background of the entire work which sometimes leave them with misconceptions that damage their convictions and appreciation of the doctrinal and prophetic message of the book.

In addition to *Saga's* value as a handbook of information for students and scholars of the scriptures, it also indicates areas for further research. Todd challenges interested persons to dig into problems when their location, scholastic equipment, and inclinations enable them to make contributions to Church history. It will be surprising if this book does not result in a flow of information that will make a sequel volume of equal size necessary within the next two or three years.

The complexity of interrelationships between peoples and things that are part of the background of the Book of Abraham moved Todd with the spirit of testimony, a testimony that he hoped would be sensed by his readers. He said:

Hopefully, no one could have journeyed through the pages of this book without recognizing the many unknowns, the complexity, and the strange guiding hand of the Lord that has accompanied the *Saga of the Book of Abraham*.

Todd has successfully accomplished three objectives: First, he has provided a handbook of information on the historical background of the Book of Abraham. Second, he has provided stimulus for further research that will undoubtedly be fruitful. Third, he has provided an avenue and opportunity for the spiritually sensitive to recognize the hand of God in events related to the history and publication of the Book of Abraham.

There were, none the less, a few minor annoyances in Todd's book. On page 296 he referred to William Smith's and Isaac Sheen's supposed involvement in the transfer of mummies to the "St. Louis Museum." He meant to say the *Chicago Museum* (p. 294).

Perhaps a desire to make his book more readable caused Todd to avoid extensive and specific documentation. Some references are given without page numbers, sometimes without chapter, volume or number. This obscure documentation reduces the value of the book as a tool to further research.

A possibility that the text of the Book of Abraham may have been defective and therefore both inadequate and unnecessary to the production of a revealed translation is explored and proposed by Todd (pp. 289, 325).

We may have observed additional support for this theory about a month before Todd went to press. The second article in a series on The Three Witnesses was published by Richard L. Anderson. In a quote from a patriarchal blessing recorded in 1833, December 13, (Patriarchal Blessing Book, No. 1, pages 8-9) Oliver Cowdery (recorder) added this comment:

But before baptism our souls were drawn out in mighty prayer . . . and *we diligently sought for the right of the fathers, and the authority of the Holy Priesthood, and the power to administer in the same; for we desired to be followers of righteousness and the possessors of greater knowledge, even the knowledge of the mysteries of the Kingdom of God.* (See also *The Improvement Era*, September 1968, p. 20.) (Italics mine.)

Comparing this quote with Abraham 1:2 would support the theory that a papyrus text in the hands of the prophet was not essential to production of the translation:

I sought for the blessings of the father, and the right where unto I should be ordained to administer the same; having been myself a follower of righteousness, desiring also to be one who possessed great knowledge, and to be a greater follower of righteousness and to possess a greater knowledge . . . (Italics mine.)

The near identical wording of these passages would indicate that some of the text of the Book of Abraham was revealed and recorded before the Abraham papyri came into the possession of Joseph Smith.

The Saga of the Book of Abraham is required reading for every serious student and teacher of the Pearl of Great Price.

HYRUM L. ANDRUS. *God, Man and the Universe*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1968. 507 pp. \$5.95.

(Reviewed by Robert J. Matthews, director of academic research for the Department of Seminaries and Institutes of Religion. Dr. Matthews is the author of several books and articles. Two articles on Joseph Smith's Inspired Version of the Bible were published in Vol. 9 of *BYU Studies*.)

God, Man and the Universe is the title of the first of a four-volume series to be known as *Foundations of the Millennial Kingdom of Christ*. At present it is the only volume from the press, although the other volumes are in process. They are to be titled: volume two, *The Gospel of Jesus Christ*; volume three, *The Kingdom of God*; and volume four, *Latter-day Prophecy*.

All who have attempted to write a serious book will immediately recognize that a four-volume work of the scope and span encompassed in these titles is ambitious to say the least. But Dr. Andrus seems equal to the task. As an avid researcher and gatherer of information, he has been lecturing and writing about Joseph Smith and the restoration of the gospel for many years. Many who have attended his lectures (this reviewer among them) have been impressed with the great array of facts, figures, and ideas he has accumulated, analyzed, organized, categorized, and systemized. Not only does he have extensive information at his command, but he manifests a keen insight and remarkable ability to interpret what he reads and