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### Matthew B. Brown and Paul T. Smith. *Symbols in Stone: Symbolism on the Early Temples of the Restoration*

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**Title**

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**Abstract** Review of *Symbols in Stone: Symbolism on the Early Temples of the Restoration* (1997), by Matthew B. Brown and Paul T. Smith.

**Matthew B. Brown and Paul T. Smith. *Symbols in Stone: Symbolism on the Early Temples of the Restoration*. American Fork, Utah: Covenant Communications, 1997. xi + 176 pp., with appendixes and index. \$21.95.**

Reviewed by Daniel B. McKinlay

One of the inevitable matters that confront the conscientious Latter-day Saint temple attender is what to make of the array of symbols that comprise much of the temple experience. The authors in this handsomely bound book discuss in considerable detail a number of the symbols found on the exterior of the Kirtland, Nauvoo, and Salt Lake Temples and occasionally other temples. But they offer more than the title of the book would suggest: they examine symbols *within* the above-named structures as well.

Their method of dealing with this project is to locate the historical and doctrinal foundations of the symbols and to report, where available, the interpretations given in the scriptures and in church documents related to the building of the sanctuaries. Giving latitude for the fact that response to symbols is subjective and flexible, I commend the authors for the materials they have gathered to inform the reader of the rich meanings that have been assigned to the various symbols; at the very least they contribute appealing possibilities for the interested learner. In some cases they alert their audience to "myths," or false interpretations not originally intended, that have circulated in church circles. While certainly there is room for more than one meaning for a given symbol, it is helpful to know what scriptural and doctrinal backgrounds can be adduced in the literature to teach us what lies behind our sacred images.

One of the bonuses for me is the inclusion in a prefatory chapter of temple-related matters pertaining to the future of Missouri. The authors have assembled scriptures and documents concerning the plan for the future temple in the "center place," at Independence, Missouri. They point out that the plans for the

great temple were similar in part to the pattern revealed for the Kirtland Temple, and they add other fascinating information from early church records, suggesting what the early Brethren anticipated in this remarkable edifice. They explain the meaning of stakes, cords, and tents and relate these and other symbols to the *parousia* or second coming of Christ. In addition they supply quotations from some of the Brethren concerning the pivotal role of Adam-ondi-Ahman, which is a location significantly tied in with priesthood and the patriarchal chain.

As part of their presentation, the authors include tasteful and inspiring accounts of visions and other manifestations to Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and other early members of the church that enhance the meaning of the symbols that are otherwise given by word. For example, the latter-day prophets, like their Old Testament counterparts, saw the specified dimensions and other features of the contemplated temples. In the section on the Salt Lake Temple, the authors piece together from a variety of sources the visionary scenes preliminary to building that magnificent structure, thus bearing witness to Brigham Young's (and Wilford Woodruff's) visionary gifts and reminding us that part of the heritage of God's people through the ages has been their esteem for consecrated land and temple. These spiritual experiences throughout the book are well documented, and in most cases have been made available in previous church publications.

The authors have researched widely in preparation for the book. Much of their material is taken from non-LDS scholarly works that deal with symbols, and in my opinion they blend in remarkably well with the considerable references taken from scripture and LDS sources. One of the natural consequences of their approach is that they demonstrate a continuity in symbolic meaning between past dispensations and this last one. The authors include copious endnotes, which should be read carefully because they contain items that are as engaging as the script itself; they are intended to bolster and enlarge the text.

I found a few places in the book where the authors might have been a little more informative. Perhaps in a future printing they could embellish these issues. On pages 65–66 they discuss the Greek letter *tau* and point out that this letter, in an interconnected pattern, once decorated gateways and domes near the Jerusalem



Temple (as it does in the Kirtland Temple), and that in the Vulgate, angels put the *tau* on the foreheads of Yahweh's people to protect them from the ravages of the destroying angels when the destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon was about to take place (see Ezekiel 9:3–6). Proceeding from that, they cite scriptures to show that the *tau* symbolized eternal life and sealing for the early Christians. This is welcome information, but I wonder if the authors could have explained a little more what the design of this letter meant anciently and why this letter had the implications to which they refer.

Similarly, on page 69 the authors discuss another symbol in the Kirtland Temple, the *gonfalon*, a *w*-shaped image that they identify with a flag or ensign designed to represent ancient mysteries. They go on to note that the individual tribes of Israel had their own ensigns and that a prophecy in Isaiah 11:10–12 refers to an ensign that would be set up for the gathering of Israel in the latter days. This they tie in to the restoration of the keys of gathering bestowed by Moses in the Kirtland Temple. I value these connections, but I would appreciate a little more understanding of what the gonfalon with its peculiar shape meant in earlier days.

On pages 106–7 the authors inform their readers that, in the architectural design for the Nauvoo Temple, an emblem that looked like a flame was located on the upper end of the spire. They comment a little on flames and fires in Solomon's Temple, quote a spiritual report by Perrigrine Sessions about the Nauvoo Temple having flames lighting on it, then cite an account of the glory of the Lord in the latter temple, recorded by Samuel W. Richards. I am grateful for the Richards quotation; however, I feel that it is a bit of a stretch to relate this incident to flames or fire in the Nauvoo Temple. But these slight deficiencies (as I see them) are more than compensated for with the richness of the suggestions the authors present for the interested student of latter-day temples.

Some members of the church may wonder at the wisdom of disseminating a book on a theme as sensitive as the temple. In my experience with reading the book, I found that it maintains an impressive balance between manifesting discreet respect for sacred matters while at the same time providing genuine insight. The complex of temple themes is vast, since it is reflective of the plan

of salvation with Christ in the lead. The book is neither inappropriate nor insipid. And though the style is restrained and sober, it is invigorating.

As we witness the accelerated visionary movement of President Gordon B. Hinckley in the construction of temples around the world, thoughtful Latter-day Saints will desire edifying literature to help make the experience of temple participation increasingly meaningful. I believe that this exciting book can be an aid in this endeavor (with all due recognition and understanding that it is not an official publication of the church and that it represents the views of the authors) and that this tome will be enjoyed especially by at least two classes of Latter-day Saints: (1) those who have an intense interest in early church history and (2) those who enjoy studying suggestions about temple symbolism. In many instances I suspect that these two groups will overlap.