



4-1-1970

The Lion of the Lord: A Biography of Brigham Young Stanley P. Hirshson

Leonard J. Arrington

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

Recommended Citation

Arrington, Leonard J. (1970) "*The Lion of the Lord: A Biography of Brigham Young Stanley P. Hirshson*," *BYU Studies Quarterly*: Vol. 10 : Iss. 2 , Article 13.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol10/iss2/13>

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

Book Reviews

STANLEY P. HIRSHSON. *The Lion of the Lord: A Biography of Brigham Young*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969. 391 pp. \$8.95.

(Reviewed by Leonard J. Arrington, professor of economics and history at Utah State University. The author of *Great Basin Kingdom: An Economic History of the Latter-day Saints*, Dr. Arrington has published in *Western Humanities Review*, *Rural Sociology*, *Dialogue*, *BYU Studies*, and a variety of historical journals.)

There are three major problems connected with this "biography" of Brigham Young. First, it is not based on the primary sources which detail the life and thought of Brigham Young. Second, it does not present to the reader a portrait of Brigham Young as a family man, as a church president, as a territorial governor, and as a businessman. Third, granted that the life of Brigham Young is inextricably linked with the Church he so profoundly influenced, the author has demonstrated only a superficial knowledge of the history and doctrine of that Church.

The primary sources for a biography of Brigham Young are largely in the LDS Historian's Library-Archive in Salt Lake City, and include the following:

1. "Brigham Young Manuscript History." In 47 thick handwritten volumes, this history was commenced in 1856 under the direction of George A. Smith and Wilford Woodruff, and covers the years 1844 to 1877. Nearly all of it is copied into the Journal History of the Church, a 1200-volume scrapbook history which is available to all researchers, including Mr. Hirshson. The Journal History is the richest single source on the events affecting Brigham Young which transpired during the years 1830 to 1877.
2. "Brigham Young Letter Books." These consist of 15 handwritten volumes, all but three of which contain 1,000 pages or more, and are copies of letters written by

- Brigham Young during the years 1851 through 1877. These are the richest single sources of Brigham Young's thoughts, attitudes, motives, and policies.
3. "Brigham Young Papers." These consist of 19 boxes, approximately 1,000 pages per box, containing speeches, certificates, rough draft copies of letters, papers connected with the settlement of the Brigham Young estate, and other official private papers for the years 1834 to 1877.
 4. "Brigham Young Telegram Books." These are four bound volumes with telegrams sent during the years 1864 to 1879.
 5. "Brigham Young Diaries, 1837 - 1846." There are four volumes of these, part of which are holographs. They reveal Brigham Young's dedication, education, and powers of observation.
 6. "President's Office Journal." Five volumes of notes with respect to affairs conducted in the Church President's Office during the years 1850 to 1857.
 7. "First Presidency Papers, 1833-1969." One box of these contains Brigham Young material.
 8. "Council of Twelve Papers, 1847 - 1969." One box contains Brigham Young material.
 9. "Historian's Office Journal, 1845 - 1961." Thirty volumes of this rich source cover the Brigham Young era.
 10. "Diaries and Papers of Brigham Young's Close Associates." These include diaries of Heber C. Kimball, Orson Pratt, Willard Richards, George A. Smith, Erastus Snow, Horace Eldredge, and others. They also include papers of Heber C. Kimball, Daniel H. Wells, Willard Richards, George A. Smith, Orson Hyde, Thomas B. Marsh, William H. Hooper, Orson Pratt, Parley P. Pratt, Horace Eldredge, John Bernhisel, Jedediah M. Grant, Erastus Snow, and Lorenzo Snow. There are also diaries and papers of some of Brigham Young's wives (Eliza R. Snow, Emily D. Partridge), and several of his children (Susa, John W., Brigham, Jr., Willard), and several of his brothers and sisters and nieces and nephews.
 11. "Utah Territory Papers." "Indian Affairs Papers."
 12. There are countless boxes of minute books, account books, and papers of virtually all of the enterprises with which Brigham Young was connected, such as banks, railroads, manufactories, wholesale and retail establishments, and farms and irrigation enterprises.

All of the above materials are in the LDS Church Historian's Library-Archive in Salt Lake City, and have been used by scholars, both Mormon and non-Mormon—but not by Mr. Hirshson. In addition, there are manuscript materials not used

by Mr. Hirshson in the Utah State Historical Society Library-Archive (an 1857 Brigham Young diary, Young's executive record books and letterpress books as governor), Brigham Young University (including three Brigham Young account books and the papers of a son), and the University of Utah Library. Hirshson also failed to use "Extracts from the Manuscript History of Brigham Young" in the Bancroft Library, which is now printed, and most of the great quantity of materials in the National Archives that relate to Brigham Young (Utah and the Church) during the years 1847 to 1877.

The failure of Mr. Hirshson to use the above materials is difficult to explain, not to say justify. Mr. Hirshson, who was the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship to do the research, states in his Preface: "At the Mormon Church Historian's Office in Salt Lake. . . . I received no help or encouragement." Actually, there is on file in "the Mormon Church Historian's Office in Salt Lake" a document personally signed on May 17, 1966, by Mr. Hirshson and A. William Lund, the Assistant Church Historian, which specifically grants permission to Mr. Hirshson to use (among other things) manuscript histories and the Journal History of the Church. The records in the Church Historian's Office reveal that Mr. Hirshson was in the Church Historian's Library less than one day. Since dozens of scholars, both Mormon and non-Mormon, have used these materials day after day, week after week, and month after month, Mr. Hirshson's failure to examine them would appear to be due to his personal desire to do the bulk of his research in metropolitan New York.

If Mr. Hirshson had really wanted to use the abundant primary materials, there are at least a dozen professional historians in Utah who could have told him what materials were available and how he could obtain them. If professors have a right to expect resourcefulness and persistency in graduate students, how much more ought we to expect them from a scholar who had previously written two first-rate books: *Farewell to the Bloody Shirt* (1962) and *Grenville M. Dodge* (1967).

What, then, is this "biography" based upon? "The key to understanding him [Brigham Young] is not in the Rocky Mountains but in the Midwest and along the Atlantic Coast," writes Mr. Hirshson. Great eastern newspapers, he wrote, sent "their best reporters to Salt Lake City for varying periods of time, and to interview leading Mormons who came East." The

primary source materials in Utah, writes Mr. Hirshson without examining them, would probably yield "nothing startling," therefore the key is in New York newspapers. This is analogous to suggesting that the key to understanding Robert E. Lee is not in Virginia, but in the Yankee correspondents' reports about him in the Big City newspapers. Or, if it is more convenient to do one's research in London, then no doubt the key to Lee is in the British Museum! By actual count, Mr. Hirshson's "Biography of Brigham Young" has 498 footnote references to New York City newspapers and 101 references to other eastern newspapers.

Obviously, it is a contribution to have combed New York and other eastern newspapers for interesting stories and quotable excerpts about Brigham Young and the Mormon Church. But to suppose that contemporary eastern reporters were sufficiently "in the know" that their stories can be used as substitutes for primary evidence when, as in this instance, such is available, is fatuous. How accurate were the stories filed by these correspondents about Western Indians? Western Outlaws? Or even Grenville Dodge? How far would a Ph.D. candidate get if he proposed to write a biography of Santa Anna, Pancho Villa, or Porfirio Diaz by spending one day in Mexico and the remainder combing through New York newspapers?

There are many specific errors which demonstrate the eastern correspondents "gang aft aglay." For example, Mr. Hirshson states (p. 9) that Heber C. Kimball "left no evidence he ever learned to read and write," and cites as his source the *New York Times* for May 19, 1858. As a matter of fact, there must be at least a dozen readers of this review who have used Heber C. Kimball diaries, several of which, as they must have observed, are in Elder Kimball's own unmistakable handwriting. There are also holograph letters, certificates, and other memorabilia of Elder Kimball in the Church Archive. The same noncredibility pertains to Hirshson's ridiculous list of seventy wives of Brigham Young. His evidence is about as sound as the speculations of newspaper correspondents a hundred years later about the "men in the life of Jackie Kennedy."

In short, despite the impressive looking bibliography, this is biography based on hearsay, rather than on the kind of hard evidence that the scholar unearths by his diligence and insight in working through primary sources. This may account for the

failure of *The Lion of the Lord* to describe and assess Brigham Young's problems and contributions in such areas as colonization, settlement, immigration, economic development, and ecclesiastical organization and management.

Because he was writing primarily from hearsay sources, Hirshson gives support to the same stereotypes that were given currency by Eastern and British travelers to Mormonland in Brigham Young's day. Mr. Hirshson needs to understand the following: (1) Contrary to contemporary stereotypes, many early Mormons were educated, sophisticated, and sincere; they saw in "the Restored Gospel" the "way to perfection." (2) As with all political (and religious) leaders, Brigham Young had the problem of searching for consensus among a welter of conflicting opinions and attitudes. Assuming a monolithic church-state, Hirshson exhibits no comprehension of the tensions, struggles, controversies, and disagreements within the faith which are evident in the diaries of the period. (3) In opposition to the "women in bondage" theme, hundreds of intelligent Mormon women left testimonies to the manner in which their faith and Church gave them greater freedom and independence than they could have enjoyed in contemporary American and European society. (4) The devious motives attributed to Young are often understood and explained by reference to Brigham Young's letters. Certainly Brigham Young used "policy," and money and power entered into his calculations, but the serious student can hardly question his sincerity, and the decision-making process is almost always more complex than Hirshson indicates. (5) The grossly exaggerated stories of Brigham Young's wealth are based upon correspondents' inability to distinguish between Brigham Young's wealth in his private capacity and in his functioning as the trustee-in-trust of his Church. (6) If he had read just a dozen (of the hundreds available) of Brigham Young's letters to his children, Mr. Hirshson would have seen the personal interest of the Mormon leader in his family, their activities and welfare.

Since it is clear that even Guggenheim Fellows will not use primary Mormon materials which are available to them, it behooves Mormon historians conveniently located close to Salt Lake City to use the rich materials which the Church Historian's Library-Archive has to offer. If a good biography of Brigham Young has not been written (and clearly *The Lion of the Lord* doesn't fill the bill) it is up to Mormon scholars to write one

and see that it is published. Hirshson's book is dramatic evidence of the acute need of publishing some, if not all, of the Brigham Young papers.

RICHARD P. HOWARD. *Restoration Scriptures: A Study of Their Textual Development*. Independence, Missouri: Herald Publishing House, 1969. 278 pp. \$5.95 hardback; \$4.95 paperback.

(Reviewed by Robert J. Matthews, Director of Academic Research for the Department of Seminaries and Institutes of Religion at the Brigham Young University. Dr. Matthews has published widely in Church-related studies.)

This recent publication by the historian of The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints traces the textual development of the Book of Mormon, the "Inspired Version" of the Bible, and the Doctrine and Covenants from the earliest dictated manuscripts to present-day published editions. It is an historical study of the long and sometimes complicated journey that was involved in the transfer of ideas from the mind of the Prophet Joseph Smith to the final recording of those ideas on the printed page. This journey entailed a process of several steps such as dictation to a scribe, transcription, emendation, and revision of pre-publication manuscripts to obtain greater clarity and improved meaning, and also for correction of scribal error, followed by first-edition publication, and finally additional revision and correction in subsequent published editions.

It is Mr. Howard's observation that there is a difference between revelation from God and the record of that revelation. Scripture is the *record* of a divine revelation, but not the *revelation* itself. In continuing this theme, consistent with the evidence of original and other pre-publication manuscripts, Mr. Howard concludes that revelation did not generally come to the Prophet in a mechanical stereo typed manner of exact words and phrases, but rather that the Prophet was revealed concepts which he was obliged to express in his own words. Since all knowledge was not given in a single revelatory experience, later revelations contributed to the understanding of earlier revealed principles. The obligation that was placed on the Prophet to work out his own forms of expression, plus