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Doing the Works of Abraham: Mormon Polygamy, Its Origin, Practice, and Demise. Kingdom in the West: The Mormons and the American Frontier, volume 9

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B. Carmon Hardy, ed. *Doing the Works of Abraham: Mormon Polygamy, Its Origin, Practice, and Demise. Kingdom in the West: The Mormons and the American Frontier*, volume 9.
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Reviewed by Kathryn M. Daynes

Joining a significant topic with one of its preeminent scholars is a certain formula for an important book. Such is *Doing the Works of Abraham* by B. Carmon Hardy. Polygamy shaped nineteenth-century Mormonism's relationship with the remainder of the world, and Hardy has written numerous articles and books on the topic, including *Solemn Covenant*,¹ named Best Book of the Year for 1992 by the Mormon History Association. The publication of this documentary history of nineteenth-century plural marriage is thus a major event in the ongoing scholarship on the topic.

The subtitle of the book accurately reflects the scope of the book, from the origins of plural marriage in Nauvoo, through its practice and opposition to it in Utah, and to its demise in the wake of federal prosecutions and the 1890 and 1904 Manifestos. Organized chronologically in general, it nevertheless includes chapters on topics such as Mormon defenses of polygamy, opponents' arguments, and individuals' experience living the principle. The coverage is comprehensive on polygamy within The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, concluding with only a brief discussion and one document about fundamentalism.

Hardy's selection of a wide variety of published and unpublished documents reflects his long familiarity with and vast knowledge of polygamy. Among the many included are the expected documents, such as the revelation that became Doctrine and Covenants 132, William Clayton's narrative of the context in which the revelation was recorded, Belinda Marden Pratt's "Defence of Polygamy," Kate Field's condemnation of it, antipolygamy legislation (Morrill, Edmunds, and Edmunds-Tucker Acts), *Reynolds v. United States*, and the Manifestos (1890, 1904, and 1933). Even better in illustrating Hardy's mastery of the topic are the many less familiar documents, such as Orson Hyde's sermon on bridling sexual passion reported by Luke William Gallup, Charles R. Bailey's account of his marriages to two wives,

and Charles R. Bliss's 1885 letter to Grover Cleveland averring that "Senator Edmunds has," by opposing polygamy and unwittingly inciting rebellion, "solemnized more polygamous marriages than Brigham Young" (305). And there is George Q. Cannon's obscure (and, in terms of policy, wisely forgotten) 1857 editorial to the *Western Standard* entitled "Improvement to our Species," which advocated laws forbidding the unhealthy to beget children and the death penalty for prostitutes and those guilty of illicit intercourse (106–9). Hardy's extensive scholarship is evinced by his selecting the most original source, choosing, for example, to print Kingsbury's copy of the original Clayton transcript of the 1843 revelation about polygamy written from Joseph Smith's dictation, instead of using the version in Doctrine and Covenants 132. Random checking of several documents revealed minor spelling and capitalization differences between the original and what is published in this book, but never is there a substantive difference in meaning.

Unfortunately, the publisher demanded that Hardy's manuscript be cut by a third. Still, the book's introductions, conclusions, and interconnecting narrative represent the most comprehensive and up-to-date work extant on polygamy, for Hardy's knowledge encompasses not only original materials but the secondary literature as well. A documentary history necessarily privileges what individuals wrote, de-emphasizing overall trends and patterns, but Hardy overcomes this at least in part by discussing a variety of issues, such as the prevalence of polygamy in Mormon society. Hardy's knowledge of the sources is reflected in the extensive, although not exhaustive, bibliography, providing an excellent guide to the wide literature on polygamy. Surprisingly, not every work given in the abbreviated footnote citations is listed in the bibliography, which does not include Hardy's own article "Self-Blame and the Manifesto." (Full bibliographic citations for such excluded works may be found at <http://mormonhistory.byu.edu>.)

Hardy's objective was to write as "full and balanced a portrait of nineteenth-century polygamous Mormonism as possible" (19), a goal he achieves—which is not to say that he does not bring his own perspective. While he puts the origins of polygamy within a European intellectual context, he also acknowledges participants' own accounts of their spiritual experiences. The 1890 Manifesto, he writes, "gave the impression of being little more than private opinion publicly expressed" (348), but he also notes that "Woodruff earnestly believed that divine intent prompted his mind and hand" (344). As for the changes the Manifesto wrought, Hardy accurately puts the revelation into the larger context of events both before and after its issuance, even if it was "the most significant turn" up to that date in the various transformations that ended plural marriage within the Church (341).

The balanced portrait Hardy presents flows from his own tolerance and genuine humanity. However, his tolerance is tried by some of his nineteenth-century subjects, who, consistent with their cultural milieu, viewed women as inferior. But sometimes his depictions of some early Church leaders' views of women are tenuous. An account by Samuel Bowles of Heber C. Kimball's sentiment is questionable as an accurate depiction of LDS beliefs about women. Readers may also raise an eyebrow at the author's paraphrase of Heber C. Kimball's 1854 remarks. The original quotation reads that Kimball intended to "put my property & all my wives into the Church. I am going to dedicate all I have to God. . . . My body is only lent to me by the Lord." Hardy renders the quote to say that Kimball "intended to place his wives *with the rest of his property* into the keeping of the church" (128, emphasis added), shifting the meaning from Kimball's acknowledging God as the giver of all to Kimball's viewing women as property. Such lapses, if such they be, are rare and spring from Hardy's repugnance to treating anyone with disrespect. Similarly, while he treats opponents of polygamy and the Saints with balance, he nevertheless deplors anti-polygamists' intolerance (392). His sympathies, though not uncritical, lie with those who sacrificed to live in plural marriage. They deserve, he claims, "a long overdue heraldic place on the tablet of this American Israel's pioneer epoch" (392), but, he laments, they are now rewarded with "official inattention" (388) from the society they helped to build.

This book is a tribute to their struggle both to live plural marriage and to defend it in the face of overwhelming governmental and social opposition. And it is a treasure trove both for scholars and casual readers, a model of scholarship that unfolds a compelling story.

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1. B. Carmon Hardy, *Solemn Covenant: The Mormon Polygamous Passage* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992).