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Exploring the First Vision

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NOTICES

Izapa Sacred Space: Sculpture Calendar Codes, by V. Garth Norman (Sunhew Press, 2012).

This book is the culmination of fifty years of research by one of the foremost scholars in the field of Pre-Classical Mesoamerican studies, particularly focusing on the important site of Izapa, located on the southern Pacific coast of Mexico near the border of Guatemala. Archaeologist V. Garth Norman began his work at Izapa in 1962 and continued to work at the site for two decades on behalf of the New World Archaeological Foundation, resulting in the publication of his *Izapa Sculpture: Album* in 1973, *Izapa Sculpture: Text* in 1976, and *Astronomical Orientations of Izapa Sculptures* in 1980, a pioneering contribution to the important field of archaeoastronomy.

Izapa is the largest and most important Late Formative (500 BC–AD 200) center in the region, with large pyramidal structures constructed around a number of plazas dotted with sculpted monuments placed at key points. More than eighty carved monuments are known from the site, an unprecedented wealth of art and a key resource to our understanding of ancient Mesoamerican society and theology. Norman begins with the premise, first proposed by Vincent Malmström in 1973, that Izapa's latitude makes it the perfect candidate for the origin of the two most important ancient Mesoamerican calendars.

But Norman goes well beyond this important finding by asserting that the positions of the Izapa monuments constitute a massive system for calendric interpretation. In so doing, he convincingly asserts that these monuments must be studied and interpreted as a whole, rather than to read them individually or out of context. In addition, he masterfully demonstrates that the

complex artistic symbolism of the Izapa monuments is just as highly developed a system of communication as the hieroglyphic texts of the Maya. Norman's profound understanding of the underlying Mesoamerican theology of Izapa and related cultures adds much-needed blood and flesh to what otherwise would be a lifeless corpse of mathematical and astronomical data. He uses the myth narratives of the Popol Vuh and ethnographic sources creatively, showing that the Izapans were not just interested in the dance of planets and stars in the heavens but also in what these movements say about the cycles of life itself.

This book will surely prove to be of great interest to anyone interested in the art, science, and culture of ancient Mesoamerica.

—Allen J. Christenson

Exploring the First Vision, edited by Samuel Alonzo Dodge and Steven C. Harper (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Religious Studies Center, 2012).

This book sets out to do exactly what the title says it does—explore the First Vision. For most readers, that exploration will take them places they have not yet seen. Writings by many well-known Church scholars are brought together to give a broader and deeper meaning to the genesis event of the Restoration. Contributors include scholars such as James B. Allen, Richard Lloyd Anderson, Milton V. Backman Jr., Steven C. Harper, Dean C. Jessee, Larry C. Porter, and John W. Welch. Their qualifications, research, and insights are impressive, and they have strived, in an evenhanded and rigorous way, to achieve the “coupling [of] historical study with faith” (xviii).

This volume includes foundational, classic scholarship in previously published articles, such as “The Earliest

Documented Accounts of the First Vision” by Jesse and “Emergence of a Fundamental: The Expanding Role of Joseph Smith’s First Vision in Mormon Religious Thought” by Allen. Newer scholarship is also included, such as Anderson’s chapter on the historical setting of the First Vision, a chapter by Allen and Welch comparing the multiple accounts of the First Vision, and Harper’s response to three common arguments made by those who dispute the First Vision narrative.

Each chapter of this book works together to create a sharper picture of the First Vision. The previous scholarship enriching this volume acts as a foundation on which the new First Vision scholarship stands. Together they make this volume the most thorough approach to date for studying this axial gospel event.

While *Exploring the First Vision* is valuable because it brings the best scholarship, once diffused in sundry books and journals, into a single volume, the book is especially valuable for Latter-day Saints who have struggled to make sense of the different accounts of the First Vision. For instance, the evidence in the chapter by Allen and Welch demonstrates that the multiple accounts of Joseph’s First Vision consistently harmonize, and moreover they possess a casual quality to them that lends credence to their authenticity. As the studies in this book show, these are honest accounts, hardly the writings of one bent on perpetrating any kind of fraud.

All who are interested in the spiritual roots of Latter-day Saint historical and religious experience can welcome this book as an enlightening and up-to-date resource. It takes Joseph’s prophetic calling far beyond its basic details and opens valuable pathways to new vistas of understanding.

—James T. Summerhays

Villages on Wheels: A Social History of the Gathering to Zion, by Stanley B. Kimball and Violet T. Kimball (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2011).

With all that has been said and written of the pioneer heroes of early Mormonism, *Villages on Wheels* beats down the partition of dates and facts to channel the voices of those who were “called to pass through it.” Uniquely organized to attract both the scholar and lay reader, *Villages on Wheels* presents the unadulterated history of the pioneers through hundreds of diaries, journal entries, and poems written by those who blazed the trail. Unlike other works on the exodus, *Villages* is a social history—a history of the common man told by the common man—independent of the political and economic approach that is more commonly discussed in academia. This characteristic makes the book accessible, educating and entertaining readers of all interest levels and disciplines.

Villages is clearly not a devotional work; the Kimballs include the good, the bad, and the ugly to honor the reality of the journey and give human dimension to the experience. The authors realize such human dimension in the book’s focal point: the daily life of those on the trail. The title itself encapsulates the development of community identity that grew among the Saints during the period of the migration. No longer were these early members of the Church defined by their individual heritage or nationality, but rather as a traveling faith-culture united in purpose and eternal inheritance—a concept that is key to the book’s thesis.

A distinguishing feature of *Villages on Wheels* is its chapter entirely dedicated to the lives of the unsung heroes of the trek—the draft animals that paved the trail with their hooves. Explaining journal entries of those who