Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr., eds., *The Book of Mormon: First Nephi, The Doctrinal Foundation*

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This volume contains some twenty-one papers presented at the Second Annual Book of Mormon Symposium held at Brigham Young University during the Fall of 1986. It is the tendency of such "proceedings" volumes, as of any composite work, to be uneven in quality, and this book is no exception. However, I was pleasantly surprised to find that the variation is not extreme. While several of the papers are not particularly distinguished, and while a few are merely pedestrian rehashes of what the Book of Mormon already clearly says, none of the papers is truly bad. And some are very good indeed. The editing appears generally competent as well, although oddities like "comarable" (for "comparable," p. 252) and "inacapable" (for "incapable," p. 304) did manage to creep through, as did the plural verb "produce" in the first full paragraph of p. 236, where it should clearly have been singular. But these are trivial matters which do not affect the overall quality of the book. Besides, as the still quite fallible editor of the present Review, I should be very careful when throwing stones.

I would rather throw bouquets, and I shall. The reviewer of a volume with multiple authors, if he would be briefer than the book under consideration, has little choice but to race through the various chapters making inadequate comments on

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1 I will nonetheless admit that the apparent misuse of "inferred" for "implied," on p. 233, seems a bit more serious, even though it is a common mistake and is sanctioned even (and most distressingly) by the Oxford English Dictionary. (See OED sub voce "infer," definition 4.) The logical processes of implication and inference are quite distinct, and should remain so. For the record, the general sense of the verb "to imply" is "to involve or comprise as a necessary logical consequence; to involve the truth or existence of (something not expressly asserted or maintained) ... to express indirectly; to insinuate, hint at." (See OED s.v. "imply.") "Inference," on the other hand, is defined by the OED as "the action or process of inferring; the drawing of a conclusion from known or assumed facts or statements; esp. in Logic, the forming of a conclusion from data or premises either by inductive or deductive methods; reasoning from something known or assumed to something else which follows from it."
them. I shall mention those articles which caught my attention, and for which I would recommend this volume to friends.

Truman G. Madsen’s “B.H. Roberts: The Book of Mormon and the Atonement” is, of all the papers making up the book, the one least clearly related to First Nephi. This is not merely because of its concern with Elder Roberts, but also because its treatment of the Book of Mormon ranges over the whole of that book instead of limiting itself to, or even particularly emphasizing, the early pages. Still, Madsen’s article is of great interest. In distinction to many of the other chapters, its focus is somewhat theological. (In an article entitled “The Mysteries of God Revealed by the Power of the Holy Ghost,” Gerald N. Lund does raise theological questions of the sort which have occupied first-rate minds for centuries. Is God in time? Is his foreknowledge compatible with human freedom?) Madsen is persuasive in his demonstration that, despite the controversy which has recently swirled about him, B.H. Roberts occupied himself both seriously and faithfully with the Book of Mormon right up until his death. Still, the article leaves this reviewer, at least, unsatisfied. For more than a decade now, Truman Madsen has tantalized us with glimpses of B.H. Roberts’s last great project, his fifty-five-chapter manuscript masterpiece, “The Truth, the Way, and the Life.” Will we never see that work in print? Elder Roberts surely represents one of the finest intellects the Restoration has yet seen. Will we never get a chance to study at firsthand the writings he worked at so long, and considered his best?

Daniel H. Ludlow subjects “The Title Page” of the Book of Mormon to a rare but richly deserved close reading. Proposing a new view of the authorship of that short text, and suggesting a somewhat different paragraph structure for it than appears in our current printed editions, Ludlow offers a new and possibly richer understanding of its meaning. Philip M. Flammer brings a historian’s perspective to the Book of Mormon’s statements on the Americas as “A Land of Promise, Choice Above All Other Lands.” He briefly treats the explorations of Columbus, seen as divinely inspired by both Nephi and the admiral himself, as well as the influence of “Divine Providence” in the career of George Washington. “The birth and growth of the United States is easily one of the more astonishing events in human history,” he writes, “strong support indeed for the concept of divine assistance during that trying period” (p. 226).
Some of the articles in *Doctrinal Foundation* do not perhaps yield spectacular new breakthroughs, but are nonetheless valuable either as workmanlike synopses of fairly complex data or as accounts of the current state of particular questions. Rex C. Reeve, Jr., for example, contributes a handy conspectus on “The Book of Mormon Plates,” while Paul R. Cheesman summarizes the work of several previous writers on the route and conditions of “Lehi’s Journeys” in Arabia—a subject of particular interest to me. In his “Stela 5, Izapa: A Layman’s Consideration of the Tree of Life Stone,” Alan K. Parrish leads us through the work of M. Wells Jakeman and V. Garth Norman on that stela, which has been argued by some to contain a representation of Lehi’s vision of the Tree of Life as recorded in 1 Nephi 8. It is an interesting and well-informed piece, although I would personally have liked to see a discussion of the criticisms which have been levelled against the Lehite explanation of the stela by such people as John Sorenson, Hugh Nibley, and Dee Green. (Parrish alludes to them, but leaves it at that.)

Another group of papers in the volume represents original research of the sort now often associated with the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies. This is not surprising, since some of their authors are principals in F.A.R.M.S. John W. Welch does a fine job, in “The Calling of a Prophet,” of placing Lehi in his ancient Near Eastern and Israelite contexts. In doing so, he not only gives aid and comfort to those who accept the Book of Mormon as a historically authentic ancient document—how could Joseph Smith possibly have stumbled onto these things? how many of us could have done it, even with our superior educations and greater access to primary and secondary sources of information?—but demonstrates how historical approaches can shed light on the meaning of scriptural texts. John L. Sorenson’s article, “Transoceanic Crossings,” is a potentially path-breaking piece of work. In it, Sorenson attempts to determine just how much we really know or can confidently infer about the voyage of the Lehites to the New World. There is surprisingly much. Paul Y. Hoskisson takes a characteristically meticulous approach to “Textual Evidences for the Book of Mormon,” and offers as three examples of what he terms “seemingly sufficient ... evidence” items taken, respectively, “(1) from the style, (2) from the onomasticon, and (3) from the context of the Book of Mormon” (p. 287).
Hoskisson is well-trained in ancient Semitic languages, and comfortable with a range of Indo-European languages as well; to observe his methodological rigor—something which is, alas, not always present in Book of Mormon studies—is almost æsthetically pleasing. And it is especially gratifying that he produces interim results which are favorable to the traditional LDS understanding of the Book of Mormon.

For me, one of the high points of this volume is definitely Stephen E. Robinson’s “Early Christianity and 1 Nephi 13-14.” In this essay, Robinson skillfully analyzes the Book of Mormon’s discussion of “the great and abominable church.” (This particular subject is another on which Latter-day Saints frequently have not been as careful as they should be.) His distinction between the “historical” use of that phrase in 1 Nephi 13 and its “typological” or “apocalyptic” use in chapter 14 is by itself almost worth the price of the book. But there is considerably more. Both as a medievalist and as someone who values respectful communication with those of other faiths, I am grateful for his exculpation of the Church of Rome in this matter. “The commonly held notion of shifty-eyed medieval monks rewriting the scriptures as they copied,” he remarks, “is bigoted and unfair. In fact, we owe those monks a debt of gratitude that anything was saved at all.... The Catholic ... Church of the fourth century was the result of the Apostasy, its end product—not its cause” (p. 186; see, too, the useful contribution of Robert J. Matthews, “Establishing the Truth of the Bible,” which at one point takes a related position.) Finally, Robinson’s identification of “hellenized Christianity” as the real villain—in the “historical” sense—seems to me precisely on the mark, and a major contribution to a Latter-day Saint understanding of the “falling away” of the primitive Church. (In candor, I should note that Ambrose Bierce defines “admiration” as “our polite recognition of another’s resemblance to ourselves.” As a by-product of my own studies, which treat the impact exerted by the philosophical and patristic Hellenism of late antiquity upon the subsequent tradition of Islam, I too have come to the conclusion that Hellenism was the culprit in the apostasy of Christendom. But whereas the notion existed in my mind inchoately, incarnated only in an oversimplified slogan which I still like—“Alexandria was the engine of the apostasy”—Stephen Robinson has formulated the idea with clarity and learning. And he is correct, too, incidentally, on
historical and etymological grounds, when he calls the *apostasía* of the early Church not merely a "falling away" but a "mutiny."

On the whole, this volume is a credit to the Religious Studies Center at Brigham Young University and to the organizers of and participants in BYU's Book of Mormon symposia. There is solid scholarship and good thinking among the Saints, and that is cause for rejoicing among all who care about the advancement of the Kingdom.