Title

Author(s) John Gee


ISSN 1050-7930 (print), 2168-3719 (online)


Reviewed by John Gee

This is—to the best of my knowledge—the finest book on the Book of Mormon ever published by a non-Latter-day Saint press. The dark blue cover is attractive and tasteful, and the binding is much better than the typical book from a “Mormon” press. The contents within the covers should set the minimum standard for books on Mormonism. Review of any work like this is a daunting task—not only for the sheer volume of material but also for its diversity. Fortunately other reviewers have dealt with the work from other perspectives,¹ so the emphasis here will be on the Book of Mormon.

Organization

The encyclopedia is organized as follows: After the Table of Contents (p. 1:vii) is a rather superfluous list of the articles with their writers (pp. 1:ix–xxxiv). Then appears a list of contributors accompanied with a list of the articles they wrote (pp. xxxv–lix). The list is as impressive for who is not mentioned as for who is—some regretfully, some gratefully so. The Preface (pp. lxi–lxi) provides a simple overview of the set; and the Acknowledgments (pp. 1:lxiii–lxiv) contain, besides the obligatory list of kudos, mention of some who performed Herculean labors and probably deserve more recognition than they received.

The Synoptic Outline (pp. 1:lxv–lxxxvii) is designed to aid the reader in locating articles where someone might not think of looking. This is very useful, but no one should imagine it is complete or that everything is listed properly. For example, under II.B.1: “Persons, peoples, and places in the Book of Mormon” (p. 1:lxx), two of the most obvious entries, Jesus Christ and Isaiah, are not listed. Limhi, Lamoni, and Zeniff—all

¹ For example, see reviews by Davis Bitton and Craig W. Beard in *BYU Studies* 31/4 (1991): 31–37 and 38–39, respectively.
major figures—do not even have an article while Ezias and Neum, each of whom is mentioned but once in the Book of Mormon, do. Likewise under II.B.3: “General topics related to the Book of Mormon” could have included “Anti-Mormon Publications,” “Apostle,” “Archaeology,” “Astronomy, Scriptural References to,” “Biography and Autobiography,” “Cursings,” “Dispensations of the Gospel,” “Old Testament,” “Sermon on the Mount,” etc. The subject of “Grace” is listed both under II.B.2 and II.B.3 but is the only subject so listed.

The Key to Abbreviations is tucked away just before the articles (p. 1:1xxxviii). After the articles are thirteen separate appendices (pp. 4:1631–763), some comprehensive, others selective, and some of more use than others. A Glossary (pp. 4:1764–73) explains some vocabulary peculiar to the Saints, though some cross-reference from “Vocabulary, Latter-day Saint” (pp. 4:1537–38) would have been useful.

The Index (pp. 4:1775–848) is good on some things but fails on others. The running footers giving the pagination of the volumes are very useful. The illustrations, unfortunately, are not indexed. Other items are missing from the index altogether. For example, Limhi (a personal favorite) is not listed in the index although he is mentioned on pages 1:89, 100, 141, 149–50, 156, 187, 2:960; and the town of Limhi, Idaho, may be found on the map on page 1:293, as Fort Limhi on page 1:290, and spelled “Lemhi” (as it is on current maps) on page 4:1607.

The fifth volume is a copy of the Triple Combination without the indices and footnotes but with the chapter headings. The pagination in this volume, unlike the first four, is not continuous but starts over again. An introduction explaining the Latter-day Saint scriptures to non-Mormons is included (pp. 5:vii–viii). The text is supposed to be identical with the Latter-day Saint 1981 edition (this was not verified). The Facsimiles in the Pearl of Great Price are taken from the original engravings of Reuben Hedlock; ironically, Facsimile 2, originally the largest of the three, is here the smallest.

The articles follow general trends in organization but have no set patterns. After the lead paragraph they tend to be either chronological (e.g., “Promised Land, Concept of a,” p. 3:1160) or run through the standard works (e.g., “Israel,” pp. 2:705–8) depending on the requirements of the subject. William G. Eggington’s article “Australia, The Church in” (pp. 1:86–88) is wonderfully and appropriately organized according to Australian instead of North American norms.
Editorial Matters

With an editorial committee containing the likes of S. Kent Brown, Richard L. Bushman, Noel B. Reynolds, and John W. Welch, the writing is guaranteed to have a high level in both accuracy and quality. The editors also deserve commendation for keeping the project on schedule while working with sometimes dawdling or even recalcitrant authors, a few of whom were intensely upset about what had happened to their articles (many of which were submitted way over their allocated length and had to be shortened). That most are still on amicable terms demonstrates that Mormons are Christians who follow Christ’s teachings (pace Shipps, p. 2:940).

The editorial hand in the encyclopedia has been occasion­ally heavy partially because the editors at Macmillan follow cer­tain current trends intent on obfuscating English; this is bother­some. For example, replacing the English generic “man” with the Latin-derived “human” (e.g., p. 4:1460) and “mankind” with the more awkward and infelicitous “humankind”2 (e.g., pp. 1:409, 2:526, 547, 3:772, 1161) may be faddish among certain groups with ears more delicate than tongues but the result, if such practices are rigidly and strictly mandated, will be that any text written before the coercive implementation of the fad will be widely misunderstood if not incomprehensible within a single generation and ever after. We too might need to “cry unto the Lord, that he will not confound us that we may not understand our words” (Ether 1:34). It is slightly disconcerting for a publica­tion devoted to explaining our history and heritage to be so oblivious to our language heritage. The shift from “mankind” to “humankind” is all the more incomprehensible because there is an article on “Mankind” (pp. 2:853–54). In certain places the zeal of the Macmillan editors to sanitize the language has dis­torted the historical facts: e.g., “Some of the lay persons present at the organization [of the Church] were ordained that day” (p. 2:603) instead of the correct “some of the lay men.”3 Likewise, the statement that “Jesus reiterated . . . laws regarding . . . prac-

---

2 “Humankind” is properly two words “human kind”; see Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “humankind.”

3 For reasons God has not revealed, it has always been the case in the Church that “women are not ordained to the priesthood”; Boyd K. Packer, “What Every Elder Should Know—and Every Sister as Well: A Primer on Principles of Priesthood Government,” Ensign 23/2 (February 1993): 10. This despite recent assertions to the contrary.
ultural honesty with fellow beings” (p. 3:1028) rather than “honesty with one’s fellowman” not only cannot be supported by the scriptures cited (Matthew 5:17–18; 3 Nephi 12:17–48; Luke 16:19–31, 24:13–47) but leaves one wondering exactly what it is supposed to mean to be honest with flies, emus, and mollusks. Whatever possessed either the author or the editors to write, “Cain grew up with a knowledge of God and even conversed with him person to person” (p. 1:245), the result is either abominable English or a suggestion that there were antediluvian telephones. Surely an encyclopedia should prize accuracy above faddishness. Trendiness also might explain the incorporation of articles on “AIDS,” “Feminism” (actually a very good article), “Lifestyle,” and “Poverty, Attitudes toward.” (With other articles—like “Buffetings of Satan” [p. 1:236]—one wonders why they were included at all.)

To the credit of this Encyclopedia, the imperfections of the Saints have not been glossed over. Indeed, the articles on “Vital Statistics” (pp. 4:1518–37), “Social Characteristics” (pp. 3:1371–78), “Marriage: Social and Behavioral Perspectives” (pp. 2:855–57), “Single Adults” (pp. 3:1316–17), and “Family: Family Life” (pp. 2:488–92) indicate many areas in which we need to repent, both individually and as a people.

Superficiality is a hallmark of encyclopedias and this one is no exception. The authors were specifically advised not to break new ground, so those looking to hear something new will likely be disappointed. However, since some of the work had never been done before, or because it is impossible to keep up with advances in all fields, some of the information will be new to some readers. From time to time some important insights appear. E.g., Mormon “measured civility by how women and children fared” (Phyllis Ann Roundy, p. 2:933). “The true stature of Brigham Young emerges if one seeks to compose a list of his peers. He led a ragged and impoverished band, stripped of virtually all their earthly goods, into an unknown territory. His critics and biographers note that the man was unique among the leaders of modern history, for he alone, without any political and financial backing, established from scratch in the desert an ordered and industrious society, having no other authority than the priesthood and the spiritual strength with which he delivered his teachings” (Hugh W. Nibley, p. 4:1611; Nibley’s writings [as opposed to some of his extemporaneous speeches] are always a delight to read). “Latter-day Saints prefer to use Bible Scholarship rather than be driven or controlled by it” (Stephen
E. Robinson, p. 1:112). “As God is bound by his promises (D&C 82:10), covenant-making has to be guided by revelation and performed through the authority of the priesthood. Otherwise, God is not truly made party to the accord and agreement” (Wouter van Beek, p. 1:332; the whole article is good and would be a good antidote to the idea of “binding the Lord”). “But as Jesus lives again, so will Jerusalem” (Kelly Ogden, p. 2:723).

Occasionally the writing is disappointingly pedestrian; but, on the other hand, some soars above our expectations as, for example, in articles by John Clark (“Book of Mormon Geography”), James Faulconer (“Foreknowledge of God”), Jeffery Holland (“Atonement of Jesus Christ”), June Leifson (“Afterlife”), Louis Midgley (“Theology”), Dennis Rasmussen (“Testimony of Jesus Christ”), and Stephen Robinson (“Bible Scholarship”). Most of these are essential reading for anyone interested in or working with these areas.

Concision is a constant trait in encyclopedias. Sadly, many of the articles are too short. For the most part, however, the pruning has been prudent.

The tradeoff between tedious prolix articles in which one has little interest or patience and meager laconic articles lacking sufficient information in which one is interested is solved by the bibliography appended to many of the articles and by some bibliographic articles. There are three types of problems: (1) In some cases there is regrettably no bibliography to cite; e.g., there has been little published on Hyrum Smith. (2) Sometimes important bibliography has been overlooked. (3) Some of the best information on some subjects came out after the encyclopedia.

For example, if the article on “Book of Mormon Commentaries” (1:171–72) cites Hugh Nibley’s Lehi in the Desert/The World of the Jaredites/There Were Jaredites as a Book of Mormon commentary, it should also include An Approach to the Book of Mormon, Since Cumorah, and The Prophetic Book of Mormon (CWHN 4–8). But the most coveted, sought-after Book of Mormon commentary remains the Institute manual used in the early 1980s, which is also not listed.

For example, the best work on “Forgeries of Historical Documents” (2:523) is now Richard E. Turley, Jr., Victims: The LDS Church and the Mark Hofmann Case (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992). To both “Whitmer, David” (4:1564–66) and “Book of Mormon Witnesses” (1:214–16) should be added Lyndon W. Cook, ed., David Whitmer Interviews: A Restoration Witness (Orem, UT: Grandin, 1991);
Cross-referencing, always a problem in any large work, has generally been helpful. One wonders if some authors were aware of the cross-referencing (an editorial problem); for example, if one follows the cross-reference from "Babylon" to "Worldliness," one finds no reference to Babylon (a better cross reference would be to the Glossary, p. 4:1765). There seems to be some confusion over whether the Christus in the Temple Square Visitor’s Center is by Bertel Thorvaldsen (p. 1:273) or Aldo Rebich (p. 4:1518), or whether the statue by Aldo Rebich is in Los Angeles and a replica of the Thorvaldsen statue is in Salt Lake (p. 1:273). In some cases it appears the title of the article was changed after it was written, thus explaining why certain obvious things are missing, such as why the references to appearances of Jesus Christ after his resurrection are limited to those within the first year (p. 2:734) and leave out several obvious references (e.g., Acts 7:55–56; 9:1–9; 22:3–11; 23:11; 26:12–16; 1 Corinthians 15:5–9; 2 Corinthians 12:1–5; Galatians 1:15–16; Revelation 1:10–3:22; Mormon 8:34–35).

The Graphics

The visuals used by the editorial committee are often quite striking, and many may be unfamiliar to most Church members. Examples include James C. Christensen’s stained glass window Alma the Younger Called to Repentance (1:34), Charlotte Warr Anderson’s quilt Kingdoms (p. 1:368), Alma Wright’s mural Baptism of Jesus Christ (p. 2:756), Alfred Wright’s sculpture, The Book of Life (p. 4:1429), Lucy Leuppe McKelvey’s pot (p. 2:866), the Ravenna mosaic (p. 2:880), and the anonymous works on pp. 3:956, 3:1025, and 4:1207. I have only two points of discontent: (1) Wulf Barsch (p. 1:74) and Henri-Robert Bresel (p. 4:1563) and others suffer terribly in black and white; and (2) I generally find photographs of the ordinances offensive. Though a picture may be worth a thousand words, with
the ordinances almost everything of importance is not captured on film and the result can profane a sacred moment. Since in the Church "ceremony is unpretentious" (p. 1:94), one wonders about such photographs.

Many, if not most, of the old photographs are absolutely wonderful. Some of the new ones are not. As usual, the BYU Geography Department did excellent work with the maps. Graphs are generally clear, but there are exceptions. It is almost impossible to see the dividing line between Canada and Africa on the graph on page 4:1522, and there is a similar problem on pages 4:1521 and 1531 where, while the original printing preserves a difference between Utah and the rest of the western United States, almost any photocopy will fail to preserve the subtlety in shading. The picture on page 1:301 has been flipped (but this was corrected in the third printing).

The Book of Mormon

Several of the articles deal directly or indirectly with the Book of Mormon. Many of these are important condensations of facets of the Book of Mormon that many people (especially anti-Mormons and others who have never taken the time to study the work) should carefully consider. John Clark’s "Book of Mormon Geography" (pp. 1:176–79) and John Sorenson’s "Book of Mormon Peoples" (pp. 1:191–95) are particularly insightful. The summaries of the individual books are adequate, though one wishes more of them were like Alan Goff’s "Book of Mosiah" (pp. 1:149–50) and Cheryl Brown’s "Book of Alma" (pp. 1:150–51); C. Randall Paul did yeoman work on "Third Nephi" (pp. 1:153–55), a book that simply transcends any four column summary. On the whole, the encyclopedia is up-to-date, accurate, and cautious.

Errata

There are a few errors which need to be corrected and some quibbles or queries, arranged as they appear in the encyclopedia:

The assertion that "Alma lived fewer than twenty years" after "the time of his conversion" (p. 1:35), while insightful, assumes that less than two years elapsed between Alma’s conversion and the beginning of the reign of the judges, which seems unlikely if the first missionary tour (Mosiah 27:34–35) lasted
anything as long as the later ones (see Alma 4:20 with 15:18–19; 30:6 with 43:1–3).

Erich Robert Paul’s “Astronomy, Scriptural References to,” makes the unwarranted assumption that all astronomical systems in the scriptures are based on “a heliocentric, planetary cosmology” (p. 1:82). This detracts from his normally excellent work.

The article on “Biography and Autobiography” is perplexing. If the Book of Mormon has strongly influenced both biography and autobiography in the church (p. 1:113), why should we care whether or not a majority of Latter-day Saint biographies “do not satisfy the recent taste” of intellectuals (p. 1:114), some of whom also find the Book of Mormon distasteful?

Keith Meservy’s list of biblical prophecies about the Book of Mormon (pp. 1:158–60) is missing the important prophecy about Mulek recorded in Ezekiel 17:22–24.

In discussing Book of Mormon grains, “early Akkadian *she-um*” should read simply “Akkadian *she₂um*” (p. 1:173), as *she₂um* is attested in all phases of the Akkadian language, and is ultimately of Sumerian origin.6

All of the Hebraisms listed in Brian Stubbs’s article on “Book of Mormon Language” (pp. 1:180–81) are also true of Egyptian.7

---


Was the Manchester England Stake organized on 17 March 1960 (p. 1:229) or 27 March 1970 (p. 1:227)? If it was organized on a Sunday, then it must have been on Sunday, 27 March 1960.

The idea that the word “canon . . . derives from the Hebrew qâneh (reed)” (p. 1:254) is intriguing but false; it comes from Greek kanôn (reed, measure) and while one can make a case that the Greek term derives from a Semitic language, Phoenician and Akkadian are more likely candidates than Hebrew.8

The change to the consolidated meeting schedule took place in 1980, not 1990 (p. 1:302).

While the idea that Alma and the sons of Mosiah followed the order of Nehor in their younger days is certainly intriguing (p. 2:960), it seems a bit too speculative to occupy so prominent a place in Mosiah’s biography.

There is no indication that under the system of judges set up by Mosiah “each judge was chosen by popular voice.” The reign of the judges was not necessarily the same as “representative government” (p. 2:960). Richard Bushman has already dealt with the fallacies of comparing the reign of the judges to American republicanism: “The ‘voice of the people’ entered only marginally into the appointment of an officer [in the Book of Mormon] who essentially enjoyed life tenure and hereditary succession.”9

To say that Mosiah “established an Egyptian-style system of measures for exchanging various grains and precious metals” (p. 2:960) is misleading. While there have been comparisons of the Nephite monetary system to Egyptian grain measures, it can be said neither that the Nephites got their grain measurements from the Egyptians nor that the Nephite monetary system is “an Egyptian-style system.” The Egyptians employed several different measuring systems. Egyptian grain prices fluctuated, whereas under the Nephites grain prices were fixed and apparently did

---

not fluctuate for at least the first ten years of the reign of the judges.

Calling Eugnostos the Blessed “pre-Christian” (p. 2:852) is problematical, disputed, and irrelevant, and therefore should be dropped.

The bizarre typography on page 2:882 is for Melchireša.

The term “pre-existence” (p. 3:1123) is a good English word whose prefix “pre-” is to be taken adverbially to mean “former.”

The Greek word prophētes does not typically mean “inspired teacher” (p. 3:1164), but either “foreteller” or “fortteller.”

The Egyptian Judgment of the Dead (referred to in p. 3:1407) condemned not so much the “hard-hearted” as the impure. Those so condemned would be swallowed by “m-mt, the Devourer of the Dead” or “Devourer of the Damned.”

To say that the Ten Commandments were all that were engraved on the two tablets given to Moses (p. 4:1469) is not supported by the citation (Exodus 31:18) and is certainly disputable.

It would have been useful to have had a statement on chocolate as well as colas in the article on the Word of Wisdom (p. 4:1585), since nonmembers have often insisted on the false assertion that Mormons are forbidden to eat chocolate.

Zenos can be dated more accurately than “sometime between 1600 and 600 B.C.” (p. 4:1623). The mention of “those who are at Jerusalem” (1 Nephi 19:13) in Zenos’ prophecies means that he must have lived after David took that city (2 Samuel 5:6–10). The list in Helaman 8:19–20 can be argued to be chronological, which would place Zenos before Isaiah. The possibility of Zenos being an ancestor to the Nephites (p.

---

11 On the misunderstanding of the metaphor, see Erik Hornung, Idea into Image (n.p.: Timken, 1992), 134.
13 See Hornung, Idea into Image, 101; the second rendering is based on Erik Hornung, Altägyptische Hölzenvorstellungen, (Berlin: 1968), 35.
4:1623; 3 Nephi 10:16) would place him among the northern tribes, that, along with his parable’s prophecy of the scattering of Israel, must mean that he lived before the northern kingdom was taken captive by the Assyrians in 701 B.C. Therefore, we can reduce the time in which Zenos may have lived by a factor of four: sometime between 1050 and 700 B.C.

The Zoramites separated from the Nephites in 74 B.C., not 24 B.C. (p. 4:1629).

Cost Considerations

The foregoing is not intended to detract from the merits of this praiseworthy publication. The biggest problem with the encyclopedia is its cost. Granted that $62.25 per five-hundred page volume is a competitive price these days, the lump sum is a very expensive proposition, particularly for those with limited funds.14 As I read the encyclopedia I asked myself over and over if it really was worth the exorbitant price and am forced to conclude that for most church members it is not. The average Church member is not going to learn a great deal from the average article in the encyclopedia; many of the articles could have been written by any faithful church member, because an encyclopedia simply cannot go into that much depth, and because for many members Mormonism is not something looked up in a handbook, manual, or encyclopedia, for it is not written with pen and ink but engraved on the fleshy tablets of the heart. The encyclopedia, however, was initially designed with nonmembers in mind. Because so many faithful intelligent members (along with a very few nonmembers) contributed so much of their time for generally meager monetary rewards, the encyclopedia, though hardly either official (see p. 1:lxii) or exhaustive, is authoritative. For most subjects this should be one of the first places to look, but not the last. Therefore, regardless of whether it is in any member’s home, it belongs on the shelves of every meetinghouse or public library.

---

14 The best book on the Book of Mormon is still the Book of Mormon itself (available for under $3.00 US).