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Abstract Review of *The Book of Mormon: Selections Annotated and Explained* (2005), annotated by Jana Riess.

THE BOOK OF MORMON ABRIDGED ANEW

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Jana Riess, who has earned a PhD in American religious history from Columbia University and a master of divinity degree from Princeton Theological Seminary, is the religion book review editor for *Publishers Weekly* and an adult convert to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. These qualifications no doubt netted her an invitation to prepare this book as a part of the SkyLight Illuminations series, which presents great religious classics in an abbreviated, accessible form. Religious traditions from Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam are represented in this series. With the selected text presented on the recto pages, the annotator's comments and explanations appear on the facing verso pages linked to the appropriate text by footnote numbers. The annotations offer explanations of the history, context, and meaning of the accompanying text.

As noted in the introduction, Riess first encountered the Book of Mormon in 1991 on a day trip to Sharon, Vermont, the birthplace of Joseph Smith Jr., founder of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. After two years of investigating the church and studying the Book of Mormon, she was baptized. She notes that early Mormons

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quoted much more often from the Bible than from the Book of Mormon and that only in the 1980s did it begin to be cited regularly in general conference talks,¹ perhaps because of the initiative of President Ezra Taft Benson, who encouraged Latter-day Saints to study and become more familiar with the Book of Mormon.² She continues to give background for her readers by noting that Joseph Smith called the Book of Mormon “the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion.”³ In the 1980s a new subtitle, *Another Testament of Jesus Christ*, was added, making more explicit that the book testifies of Christ and his mission and invites the reader to “come unto Christ” (Moroni 10:32).

This compilation of selections from the Book of Mormon raises some relevant issues about the approach to this book of scripture brought forth by Joseph Smith, such as abridging the text (in both ancient and modern times), reaching a specific audience, formatting the text in various editions, changing or modernizing the language, and providing commentaries.

Abridging the Book of Mormon

Riess acknowledges the difficulty of and, indeed, questions the appropriateness of reducing the Book of Mormon text to about a tenth of its original size for the purposes of this series.⁴ She does recognize “an element of hubris in presuming to choose its most significant passages” (p. xvii), which seems to have been her task. Riess admits that such an abridgment is “doubly challenging because it’s already *been*

1. Noel B. Reynolds, “The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon in the Twentieth Century,” *BYU Studies* 38/2 (1999): 6–47; Riess’s note here (p. 232) inadvertently says this was published in *Dialogue* 38/2 (1999).

2. Ezra Taft Benson, “Cleansing the Inner Vessel,” *Ensign*, May 1986, 4–7 (his first general conference address after becoming president of the church); see Benson, “The Book of Mormon Is the Word of God,” *Ensign*, May 1975, 63–65, another widely quoted address.

3. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 194; also in the introduction to the Book of Mormon, 1981 edition.

4. Such purposes are explained in the section below entitled “Book of Mormon Audience.”

through a stringent editing process” (p. xvii, emphasis in original).⁵ The original abridgers made their text selections based on the target audience, which is the modern reader.

The Book of Mormon is a complex, detailed book; its name derives from the prophet Mormon, who was the major editor responsible for abridging and collating the myriad records in his care. The title page of the Book of Mormon, written anciently by Mormon’s son Moroni, proclaims: “The Book of Mormon, an account written by the hand of Mormon upon plates taken from the plates of Nephi. Wherefore, it is an abridgment of the record of the people of Nephi, and also of the Lamanites. . . . An abridgment taken from the Book of Ether also.” However, the abridging process of Book of Mormon records began approximately a thousand years before Moroni, in the early portions of the Book of Mormon—Nephi reports that “I make an abridgment of the record of my father, upon plates which I have made with mine own hands; wherefore, after I have abridged the record of my father then will I make an account of mine own life” (1 Nephi 1:17).

Mormon describes some of the process he went through in abridging the records that had been handed down to him:

After I had made an abridgment from the plates of Nephi, down to the reign of this king Benjamin, . . . I searched among the records which had been delivered into my hands, and I found these plates [the small plates of Nephi], which contained this small account of the prophets, from Jacob down to the reign of this king Benjamin, and also many of the words of Nephi.

5. Riess discusses the ancient Book of Mormon abridgments: “Like all memoirists, he [Nephi] and other writers only recorded a small portion of the events that occurred in their lives. They geared their narratives for their perceived audiences and shaped the text accordingly. . . . The book’s final editors . . . selected only those pieces that they thought would be most helpful to readers living during and after the time when the Book of Mormon came forth” (p. 8 n. 4). See Grant R. Hardy, “Mormon as Editor,” in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 15–28; Eric C. Olson, “The ‘Perfect Pattern’: The Book of Mormon as a Model for the Writing of Sacred History,” *BYU Studies* 31/2 (1991): 10–15; and “Mormon and Moroni as Authors and Abridgers,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 269–71.

And the things which are upon these plates pleasing me, because of the prophecies of the coming of Christ; and my fathers knowing that many of them have been fulfilled; yea, and I also know that as many things as have been prophesied concerning us down to this day have been fulfilled, and as many as go beyond this day must surely come to pass—

Wherefore, I chose these things, to finish my record upon them, which remainder of my record I shall take from the plates of Nephi; and I cannot write the hundredth part of the things of my people.⁶

But behold, I shall take these plates . . . and put them with the remainder of my record, for they are choice unto me; and I know they will be choice unto my brethren. . . .

And now I, Mormon, proceed to finish out my record, which I take from the plates of Nephi; and I make it according to the knowledge and the understanding which God has given me. (Words of Mormon 1:3–6, 9)

Confident of the ultimate preservation of the records, Mormon explains that “there are great things written upon them, out of which my people and their brethren shall be judged at the great and last day, according to the word of God which is written” (Words of Mormon 1:11). In addressing the remnants of the house of Israel who were spared, Mormon makes clear what he wants the latter-day reader to gain from the words he has so carefully abridged and preserved:

Know ye that ye are of the house of Israel.

Know ye that ye must come unto repentance, or ye cannot be saved.

Know ye that ye must lay down your weapons of war . . . and take them not again, save it be that God shall command you.

6. In yet another Book of Mormon passage, Mormon acknowledges that of the “many records kept of the proceedings of this people, by many of this people, which are particular and very large,” even “a hundredth part of the proceedings of this people . . . cannot be contained in this work” (Helaman 3:13–14).

Know ye that ye must come to the knowledge of your fathers, and repent of all your sins and iniquities, and believe in Jesus Christ, that he is the Son of God, . . .

And he hath brought to pass the redemption of the world.
(Mormon 7:2–5, 7)

Mormon's editing process, then, revolves around his purpose—to witness that the gospel of Jesus Christ, as contained in the Book of Mormon, will confirm the record received by the Gentiles from the Jews, or the Bible. The two records will serve as two witnesses of Christ (again as reflected in the subtitle of the Book of Mormon: *Another Testament of Jesus Christ*).

Riess, desiring to replicate in her abridgment the central focus on Christ found in the Book of Mormon, was careful “to select those passages that offer insights into contemporary Mormon beliefs and scriptural emphases, such as the Atonement of Christ, the nature of human freedom, the purpose of baptism, and the need for repentance from sin” (p. xviii). Her winnowing process led her to delete the book of Ether, the story of the stripling warriors, and many of the war scenes (no selections from the book of Helaman appear). However, she has retained such doctrinally powerful portions as Lehi's dream (1 Nephi 8) and Nephi's vision (1 Nephi 11–12); Lehi's spiritual discourse to his son Jacob on opposition, choice, and the purpose of life (2 Nephi 2); the psalm of Nephi (2 Nephi 4); Jacob's sermon on salvation, resurrection, and the infinite atonement (2 Nephi 9); Jacob's words on chastity, pride, wealth, and consecration (Jacob 2); the allegory of the olive tree (Jacob 5); King Benjamin's sermon (Mosiah 2–5); Alma's discourse on repentance and spiritual rebirth (Alma 5); Alma's teachings on death and judgment (Alma 12); Alma's treatise on faith and knowledge (Alma 32); Alma's instructions to his son Helaman (Alma 36–37);⁷

7. In her annotations here, Riess relies heavily on John W. Welch's careful exegesis of the passage and his identification of major parallels, to which she has added several of her own (p. 160 n. 32). She cites John W. Welch and J. Gregory Welch, *Charting the Book of Mormon: Visual Aids for Personal Study and Teaching* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), chart 132, but she must have referred to one of Welch's more extensive writings on Alma 36, such as John W. Welch, “A Masterpiece: Alma 36,” in *Rediscovering the Book of*

Alma's tutoring his son Corianton on the spirit world, resurrection, and restoration (Alma 40–41); Jesus's visit to the Nephites after his death and his teachings on baptism, the house of Israel, and the sacrament (3 Nephi 11, 15, 17–18); the winding-up scenes (Mormon 6, 8); and, finally, doctrines on faith, hope, and charity, the Holy Ghost, baptism and the age of accountability (Moroni 7–8); and Moroni's challenge to receive spiritual truth (Moroni 10).⁸

A clarification is in order: Riess uses the 1920 text of the Book of Mormon, which is in the public domain. She notes differences in the 1981 version where they appear. She is not rewriting or simplifying the text, just abridging it. She notes that she has used an ellipsis to signify the “removal of the phrase ‘it came to pass that’” (p. 6 n. 2), although it also replaces the phrase “it came to pass” in some instances. Where she has skipped verses in a given chapter, she has inserted a line with five dots; the numbering of the verses, however, also makes it obvious that some verses have been excised.

Book of Mormon Audience

As has already been mentioned, the ancient editors of the Book of Mormon made their abridgment decisions based on their target audience—the modern reader. Mormon expresses his desire “that a knowledge of these things must come unto the remnant of these people, and also unto the Gentiles” (Mormon 5:9). Specifically addressing us, the latter-day readers, Moroni tells us, “Behold, I speak unto you as if ye were present, and yet ye are not. But behold, Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me” (Mormon 8:35).

As recorded on the inside front cover of *The Book of Mormon: Selections Annotated and Explained*, the intended audience for the SkyLight Illuminations series, to which this book belongs, is “today's

Mormon, 114–31. She does not, however, present this chapter in a format that makes the chiasms readily apparent.

8. It almost seemed that Riess had relied on Welch and Welch, *Charting the Book of Mormon*, charts 53–55 (which present key doctrinal chapters) in making her selections, but then, again, maybe her choices of key chapters were made independently through her own study.

spiritual seeker.” The series offers “an enjoyable entry into the great classic texts of the world’s spiritual traditions.” The translations include commentary from experts, thus enabling “readers of all backgrounds to experience and understand classic spiritual texts directly, and to make them a part of their lives.” Under a mandate to conform her volume to the needs of this series, Riess did an excellent job of selecting material that was intended to enlighten and inspire. She acknowledges that she is “not writing this to persuade people to adopt [her] religious worldview.” Her mission, if she has one, “is one of education and interfaith understanding” so that members of other faiths can “at least sample the Book of Mormon and be enriched by it” (p. xii), just as she herself has been enlightened by reading other sacred texts.

In her foreword to this book, Phyllis Tickle, founding religion editor of *Publishers Weekly*, does not know or care whether the Book of Mormon is true. The salient point for her is that “the Book of Mormon is a body of sacred literature” (p. vii). She expresses a conviction that it is important to know what is in the foundational text for a given group in order to understand and respect the beliefs of those individuals. She concedes the difficulty of “condensing holy writ” (pp. vii–viii) but praises Riess for “achieving an apogee of sorts for herself, for Mormonism, and for ecumenism,” calling her a “cordial and informed” guide (p. viii).

Formatting the Book of Mormon

Riess presents the text of the Book of Mormon with its current versification. Only rarely does she format the verses in something other than traditional prose. With permission, she has used a few of Grant Hardy’s “poetic renditions of key Book of Mormon passages” (p. xviii),⁹ especially the psalm of Nephi (pp. 61–67). Hardy’s edition, also using the 1920 text, dispenses with the traditional versification—

9. Grant Hardy, *The Book of Mormon: A Reader’s Edition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003); see the reviews by Kristine Hansen and Keith Lawrence in *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 12/2 (2003): 100–102, 103–6; the review by Kevin L. Barney in *FARMS Review* 16/1 (2004): 1–10; and the review by Louis Midgley in *Insights* 23/6 (2003): 6.

he does not alter the text but makes changes in punctuation and formatting. Other presentations of the Book of Mormon with the authorized text, also not prepared or endorsed by the church, have focused on parallelistic patterns¹⁰ or on providing maps, pictures, and other resources to enrich the reading experience for families with children.¹¹ Most recently, Doubleday has published the first commercial version of the Book of Mormon (by special arrangement with the church) in a dual-column format with no notes.¹²

The most prominent feature of the formatting of this book (which Riess may not have had any say in) is the presentation of the text on the right-hand page with the linked commentary on the facing left-hand page. As would be expected, the text and the commentary on facing pages are not always equal in length, thus leaving white space on one page or the other.

The Book of Mormon in Contemporary English

Though only tangentially related to the book under review, the techniques of simplification and adaptation of the authorized text, rather than abridgement, have been used by other authors in an attempt to make the Book of Mormon more accessible. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, the sixteen-volume *Illustrated Stories from the Book of Mormon* appeared,¹³ telling the Book of Mormon story with some additions and some omissions. Max Skousen, in 1991, provided a parallel version with the original text next to his modern-language text.¹⁴ Two years later, amidst statements issued by the church discouraging

10. Donald W. Parry, *The Book of Mormon Text Reformatted according to Parallelistic Patterns* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1992); see the review by Jo Ann H. Seely in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 5 (1993): 203–8.

11. Thomas R. Valletta, gen. ed., *The Book of Mormon for Latter-day Saint Families* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1999); see the review of this book by Rebecca M. Flinders and Anne B. Fairchild in *FARMS Review* 15/1 (2003): 431–34.

12. *The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ* (New York: Doubleday, 2004).

13. Raymond H. Jacobs, et al., *Illustrated Stories from the Book of Mormon*, 16 vols. (Salt Lake City: Promised Land, 1967–72).

14. Max Skousen, *The Book of Mormon . . . Condensed and Modernized Version* (privately published, 1991).

adaptations of the Book of Mormon into familiar or modern English,¹⁵ Timothy B. Wilson produced *Mormon's Story: An Adaptation Based on the Book of Mormon*, with the simplified text parallel to the authorized text.¹⁶ His 1998 version, *A Plain English Reference to the Book of Mormon*, presents only his simplified text.¹⁷ Lynn Matthews Anderson produced her version, *The Easy-to-Read Book of Mormon: A Learning Companion*, in 1995.¹⁸ Other, more recent, versions have been prepared by Mark A. Smith Sr., Susan Stansfield Wolverton, and Thomas Johnson.¹⁹ Obviously, since the original plates are not currently accessible, these books cannot be viewed as “new translations” but merely as authors’ adaptations and simplifications. As far as I can ascertain, the intentions of these authors are laudatory: They wish to make the scriptures accessible to young children, to those with learning disabilities, and to other unsophisticated readers. I do not sense that the authors are trying to recommend their versions as a substitute or replacement for reading the Book of Mormon or for purposes of conversion.

15. “Rewriting Book of Mormon into Modern English Not Authorized,” *Church News*, 20 February 1993, 3; cf. also the First Presidency statement, “Modern-Language Editions of the Book of Mormon Discouraged,” *Ensign*, April 1993, 74; reprinted in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 7/1 (1995): 1–2. The First Presidency in this statement expressed concern that “this process may introduce doctrinal errors or obscure evidence of its ancient origin.”

16. Timothy B. Wilson, *Mormon's Story: An Adaptation Based on the Book of Mormon* (privately published, 1993); see the review by Camille S. Williams in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 7/1 (1995): 3–12.

17. Timothy B. Wilson, *A Plain English Reference to the Book of Mormon* (Springville, UT: Bonneville Books, 1998); see also plainbookofmormon.com (accessed 13 April 2006).

18. Lynn Matthews Anderson, *The Easy-to-Read Book of Mormon: A Learning Companion* (Apple Valley, MN: Estes Book, 1995); see Lynn Matthews Anderson, “Delighting in Plainness: Issues Surrounding a Simple Modern English Book of Mormon,” *Sunstone*, March 1993, 20–29. See the reviews of this book by Camille S. Williams and Marvin Folsom in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 7/1 (1995): 3–12, 13–18, and by Christian K. N. Anderson in *Dialogue* 27/1 (1994): 274–78.

19. Mark A. Smith Sr., *Book of Mormon Summary* (Salt Lake City: Eborn Books, 2003); Susan Stansfield Wolverton (pen name), *Having Visions: The Book of Mormon Translated and Exposed in Plain English* (New York: Algora, 2004); and Thomas Johnson, *Modern Revelation: The Book of Mormon Concisely Translated into Plain English* (Moab, UT: WisdomSeed Press, 2005).

Book of Mormon Commentaries

After making her text selections from the Book of Mormon, Riess was then faced with the challenge of writing her annotations and explanations. This is where Riess aims at her intended audience, spiritual seekers of all faiths. She generously fills in gaps (much as Mormon did in some of his commentary—for example, in Words of Mormon 1:12–18) by explaining how much time has elapsed and by introducing a new cast of characters. She describes what has taken place in the deleted material to prepare the reader for the next selection. For example, to fill in the lengthy gap from Alma 41:15 to 3 Nephi 11:1, she writes:

We now skip ahead more than a hundred years from Alma's advice to his sons (ca. 73 BCE) to the coming of Christ to the New World (sometime between 30 and 35 CE). Prior to this scene, there have been tumultuous and cataclysmic portents; storms, earthquakes, and fires have destroyed several Nephite cities. This destruction happened in the New World at the same time that Christ was being crucified in the old. Then a thick darkness covered the land in the New World for three days (coincident to the time that Christ was in the tomb). During this time, Christ's voice spoke to the people, urging them to repent and give their hearts to him. . . . Some time later, he visits with approximately twenty-five hundred Nephite men, women, and children for three days at the temple in Bountiful. (p. 184 n. 1)

Riess is able to use some of the verses as a starting point to explain some uniquely Mormon doctrines. For example, in explaining 2 Nephi 2:16, "Wherefore, the Lord God gave unto man that he should act for himself. Wherefore, man could not act for himself save it should be that he was enticed by the one or the other," she discusses agency, foreordination, predestination, and choice:

This is a fundamental statement about human *agency*, or free will. Mormons believe that all people are free to act for

themselves and can choose God and righteousness. Although Mormons talk about some souls being *foreordained* to fulfill certain tasks—from being the prophet to mothering a particular child—they do not believe in *predestination*, or the idea that humans are merely the instruments of an all-sovereign God who chooses some individuals for salvation and others for possible damnation. Mormons hold that all people are endowed with agency and can choose between good and evil—recognizing, as this verse suggests, that both righteous and evil spiritual forces will seek to influence them. (p. 54 n. 4, emphasis in original)

One senses that Riess has done a lot of background reading in the preparation of her annotations, although this is not necessarily reflected in her endnotes, which fill merely two pages. A list of suggested readings reveals more of her sources. One of the blurbs on the back cover proclaims: “Captures the spirit and gist of the distinctively Mormon scripture. . . . Coupled with her informed, discerning, and accessible commentary, Riess’s editorial accomplishment is an act of interreligious generosity.” Riess has built on her knowledge of religious writings gained through her job with *Publishers Weekly* and is perhaps uniquely qualified to introduce the Book of Mormon to those of other faiths.

A brief look at commentaries on the Book of Mormon, most of which have been written for the believing reader, illustrates the challenge of bringing this sacred text to a higher level of understanding. Nearly a hundred years ago, B. H. Roberts wrote his three-volume *New Witnesses for God*.²⁰ Sidney B. Sperry wrote extensively on the Book of Mormon, beginning in 1947 with his *Our Book of Mormon* and culminating about twenty years later with his *Book of Mormon Compendium*.²¹ Philip C. Reynolds brought together the notes of

20. B. H. Roberts, *New Witnesses for God*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1909–11).

21. Sidney B. Sperry, *Our Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Stevens and Wallis, 1947); and Sperry, *Book of Mormon Compendium* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1968); see some of Sperry’s Book of Mormon writings gathered in the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 4/1 (1995).

George Reynolds and Janne M. Sjodahl in a seven-volume *Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, published in the mid-1950s to early 1960s,²² and Chris B. Hartshorn provided a commentary from the RLDS point of view in the mid-1960s.²³ Among many other writings on the Book of Mormon, Hugh Nibley wrote *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, first used in 1957 as a Melchizedek Priesthood manual.²⁴ More recent commentaries have come to us from Daniel H. Ludlow (1976);²⁵ Joseph Fielding McConkie, Robert L. Millet, and Brent L. Top (1987–92);²⁶ K. Douglas Bassett (2000);²⁷ David J. Ridges (2003–4);²⁸ and Monte S. Nyman (2003–4).²⁹ An encyclopedic approach was used in the information-filled *Book of Mormon Reference Companion* under the general editorship of Dennis Largey.³⁰ And, of course, the church itself has prepared some materials for its seminary and institute programs that comment extensively on the Book of Mormon.³¹

22. George Reynolds and Janne M. Sjodahl, *Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1955–61).

23. Chris B. Hartshorn, *A Commentary on the Book of Mormon* (Independence, MO: Herald House, 1964).

24. Now available in its third edition from Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988.

25. Daniel H. Ludlow, *A Companion to Your Study of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976).

26. Joseph Fielding McConkie, Robert L. Millet, and Brent L. Top, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 4 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987–92); see reviews by J. Frederick Voros Jr. in *BYU Studies* 29/2 (1989): 121–25; by Louis Midgley in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 1 (1989): 92–113; and by Donald W. Parry and J. Michael Allen in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 4 (1992): 139–46, 147–53.

27. K. Douglas Bassett, *Latter-day Commentary on the Book of Mormon: Insights from Prophets, Church Leaders, and Scholars* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 1999). Bassett's approach was to compile statements by church leaders who have had unique insights into the Book of Mormon. See the review by Ronald W. Asay in *FARMS Review of Books* 14/1–2 (2002): 1–7.

28. David J. Ridges, *Your Study of the Book of Mormon Made Easier*, 3 vols. (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2003–4). This features the full text plus interspersed commentary.

29. Monte S. Nyman, *A Teaching Commentary*, 6 vols. (Orem, UT: Granite, 2003–4).

30. Dennis Largey, gen. ed., *The Book of Mormon Reference Companion* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003); see the reviews by Don E. Norton and Sally L. Taylor in *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 13/1–2 (2004): 161–63, 163–66.

31. *Book of Mormon Seminary Student Manual* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2000); and *Book of Mormon Student Manual: Religion 121 and 122*, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1996).

Riess's selections from the Book of Mormon and the annotations of her chosen verses represent a great deal of work. Although she stands to gain little monetarily from the publication of the book—"All author proceeds from the sales of this book are being donated in equal parts to two charitable funds administered by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints" (p. xix, the Perpetual Education Fund and the LDS Humanitarian Relief fund)—she has probably herself learned a great deal about this sacred book and has made it more accessible to curious readers of other faiths.