

suppose a "wish list" of well-defined trails and sites could be endlessly imposed on such expertise as has been displayed by Stan Kimball in this and other trail guides he has published.

Kimball writes of our being in "the midst of a great American western trails renaissance" (xi) and suggests that interest in historic trails has never been greater. Those who have had a long-term fascination with these emigrant routes can only applaud what is happening and pledge their support of such monumental advances. Stan Kimball has been in the forefront of these events and as a recognized authority has given exceptional public service in assuring that both the contemporary generation and those yet future can identify their historical heritage. His current volume is a rare and carefully crafted index to an extensive geographical portion of that legacy.

DAVIS BITTON and LEONARD J. ARRINGTON. *Mormons and Their Historians*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1988. 200 pp. \$20.00.

Reviewed by Bruce A. Van Orden, assistant professor of Church history and doctrine, Brigham Young University.

"This is not a study of Mormon history but of Mormon historians" (xi), explain the authors, two prominent historians themselves. Thus begins the most ambitious attempt to date in Mormon historiography to analyze the lives and contributions of the movement's principal chroniclers.¹ In this volume Bitton and Arrington answer the questions: "How well did [Mormon historians] do their job? What do we owe to them? Where is it necessary to move beyond them?" (ix). Contending that Mormonism is not merely the story of its "men and women of action," but also "the people of the pen" (ix), the authors insist that "the way we think about our past does much to shape our identity" (xi). This volume is, then, both "a study in intellectual awareness and an exploration of group self-awareness" (xi).

Clearly, the study of historians is not a new historiographical exercise. Any university library furnishes a potpourri of such works devoted to various specialties. The emerging and growing community of Mormon historians naturally awaited a work about the best of their predecessors and contemporaries. Who better to undertake this task than Leonard Arrington and Davis Bitton, two universally

acknowledged front-runners in the field? Together as director and assistant director respectively of the LDS church's History Division during the 1970s, they wrote the bestselling *The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-day Saints* (1979). Both have been exceptionally prolific and versatile in their production and are recognized in fields other than Mormon history.

When I first heard of the prospective publication of *Mormons and Their Historians*, I expected a volume twice the size of what eventually appeared. This book is modest in its size and scope. It is actually an examination both of certain *types* of historians and also a *selection* of notable Mormon historians who fit those types. Bitton and Arrington chose individuals who established a "general pattern" of historical writing and who represented "some of the changing standards of historical writing" (xii). The Mormon historians who were thus analyzed include Willard Richards, George A. Smith, Edward W. Tullidge, Andrew Jenson, B. H. Roberts, Andrew Love Neff, Ephraim E. Ericksen, Bernard DeVoto, Fawn Brodie, Dale Morgan, Juanita Brooks, Richard L. Bushman, Jan Shipps, and Charles S. Peterson. Bitton and Arrington admit that other writers could have deserved similar attention, including T. B. H. Stenhouse, William Alexander Linn, Hubert Howe Bancroft, John Henry Evans, Joseph Fielding Smith, Preston Nibley, Nels Anderson, Milton R. Hunter, and William E. Berrett. Still other authors are noted in intentionally superficial discussions. Modestly, Arrington and Bitton hardly give passing attention to their own worthy contributions.

The authors devote chapter-length sketches to the lives and historical contributions of Church authorities (who also served as historians) Willard Richards, George A. Smith, Orson F. Whitney, and B. H. Roberts, as well as Edward W. Tullidge and Andrew Jenson, who, though not General Authorities themselves, were nonetheless at times closely connected with the hierarchy and were commissioned to complete meaty historical works for the Church. Then, in "The Beginnings of 'Scientific' History," they focus on the lives of Andrew Love Neff and Ephraim E. Ericksen. In similar manner, the authors give snapshots of Bernard DeVoto, Fawn M. Brodie, Dale L. Morgan, and Juanita Brooks in "The Bridge: Historians without History Degrees," and of Richard L. Bushman, Jan Shipps, and Charles S. Peterson in the chapter on three different contemporary ways of writing Mormon history. Each "historian" is critically yet sympathetically reviewed according to the historical standards of his or her era. The authors note, "Along with achievement of our major historical writers we have frankly noticed some weaknesses and limitations as well" (xii).

Perhaps the most interesting and enlightening chapter is “B. H. Roberts: Historian and Theologian.” Bitton and Arrington call Roberts “the most important Mormon historian of the transition period stretching from the 1880s to the 1930s. He was energetic, wrote more than anyone else before or after . . . and was popular, thus doing much to establish the way most Latter-day Saints thought about their history” (69). They applaud Roberts for his extensive use of primary sources (“No one before had exploited the raw material of Mormon history so thoroughly” [79]) and his willingness to portray the early Mormons “warts and all” (83). They note that he was remarkably similar in style to the Romantic historians Prescott, Motley, and Parkman, who “compared history to drama and sought to present it dramatically” (84). And they level criticism at Roberts’s editing of the official multivolume *History of the Church* for perpetuating many of the original publication errors and making hundreds of additional unacknowledged changes in the wording of original manuscripts. They somewhat excuse Roberts for these failings by recognizing that “standards for the editing of historical documents were not at all firmly established” (76).

As Bitton and Arrington discuss one by one the various types of Mormon historians in various eras, it is easy to sense their admiration for the diversity of styles. In this they would agree with the eminent Allan Nevins:

Place can be found for everybody but the dishonest and insincere, the great pests of history as of all other writing. Tolerance for all the varied types of historical writing is indispensable to the advance of history, and it opens the door not to confusion but to a desirable complexity. The more ideas we get into history the better, and ideas mean opinions. The enormous variety of historical materials and the steady development of disciplines applicable to these materials (especially sociology and economics) means an ever greater variety of historical views.²

Bitton and Arrington display their general pleasure with the arrival to Mormon history after World War II of professionally-trained historians and the proliferation of useful, informative, and well-written articles, monographs, and books. The generation of Mormon historians since 1946 has created a “quantum change” (145) in the field, they assert. They would also agree with Edward Hallett Carr’s assessment, as it would apply to Mormon history: “The historian of the 1920s was nearer to objective judgment than the historian of the 1880s, and . . . the historian of today is nearer than the historian of the 1920s; the historian of the year 2000 may be nearer still.”³ The most troubling concern harbored by Bitton and Arrington regarding Mormon history writing is “access to

materials” at the LDS Church Archives in Salt Lake City. While expressing appreciation that they themselves once had opportunities to study valuable and rare documents in the archives, they also note that similar access is not now as readily available. “Access is almost never total, and it is sometimes frustratingly capricious” (164), they observe. They also acknowledge that “no substantial collection [of historical materials anywhere] is wide open in the sense that anyone can take out anything he or she wants, no questions asked” (165). Yet they strongly urge increasing the availability of documents to qualified scholars and add, “Most topics, treated fairly, letting the chips fall where they may, simply do not impinge on the basic truth claims of Mormonism. . . . The faith does not require that those who believed it, including the leaders, were perfect” (166).

Even though I truly appreciate this book and profoundly admire its distinguished coauthors, I have two criticisms. One is the virtual ignoring of Joseph Fielding Smith, who began his employment as a young man in the Church historian’s office and was himself Church historian from 1921 to 1970. His one-volume survey, *Essentials in Church History*, arguably may be the most widely-read single piece of Mormon history. I fear that Bitton and Arrington did not wish to attempt a critical appraisal of Elder Smith’s historical contributions out of political considerations. They probably reasoned that since Joseph Fielding Smith was a recent Church President, even mild criticism of his approach to writing Church history could be a delicate venture. Nevertheless, they did not shrink from evaluating the contributions of other Church authorities, and to be consistent they should have more closely scrutinized the work of Elder Smith.

Bitton and Arrington also gloss over controversial decisions affecting the History Division of the Church in the late 1970s and early 1980s. They mention the sixteen-volume Church history project (138–39), but neglect to explain how and why the project was jettisoned by Church officials. They also deftly avoid explaining all the reasons why the professional historians in the History Division were transferred in 1982 to Brigham Young University to constitute the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Church History. I feel that a book published by a state-supported press (as opposed to a Church-supported one) should be more complete in its explanation of these delicate matters.

Mormons and Their Historians is beautifully bound and printed by the University of Utah Press. This is volume 2 in the series “Publication in Mormon Studies” edited by Linda King Newell, former coeditor of *Dialogue*. The insightful *Mormon*

Polygamous Families: Life in the Principle (1987) by Jessie L. Embry was volume 1. One hopes that numerous other valuable volumes will appear in this promising series.

NOTES

¹David J. Whittaker provided a more cursory study in "Historians and the Mormon Experience: A Sesquicentennial Perspective," *The Eighth Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium: A Sesquicentennial Look at Church History* (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1980), 293–327.

²Allan Nevins *on History*, comp. Ray Allen Billington (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975), 5.

³Edward Hallett Carr, *What Is History?* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), 173.

JOSEPH FIELDING McCONKIE and ROBERT L. MILLETT. *First and Second Nephi*. Volume 1 of *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987. 414 pp. \$13.95.

JOSEPH FIELDING McCONKIE and ROBERT L. MILLETT. *Jacob through Mosiah*. Volume 2 of *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988. 358 pp. \$13.95.

Reviewed by J. Frederic Voros, Jr., a lawyer and writer living in Salt Lake City.

Mormons have traditionally viewed theology and theologians with suspicion. Without a tradition of continuing revelation, other churches must rely on theologians to interpret scripture and chart doctrinal direction. But in the Mormon tradition, which proclaims that living prophets resolve doctrinal issues—and even supplement the canon—of what use are theologians? Allowing a place for theology seems to suggest either that the prophets have been insufficiently clear or that there is something worth knowing that they have not told us. Mormonism's practical bias also militates against theology: isn't our time better spent *doing* the word rather than merely *studying* it?

This is the dilemma facing Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet as they undertake their *Doctrinal Commentary*