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Review of Scot Facer Proctor, *Light from the Dust: A Photographic Exploration into the Ancient World of the Book of Mormon*

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SCOT FACER PROCTOR. *Witness of the Light: A Photographic Journey in the Footsteps of the American Prophet Joseph Smith*. Edited by Maurine Jensen Proctor. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1991. 208 pp. \$39.95.

SCOT FACER PROCTOR and MAURINE JENSEN PROCTOR. *Source of the Light: A Witness and Testimony of Jesus Christ, the Savior and Redeemer of All*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992. 208 pp. \$39.95.

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Abraham clearly points out that his family's literal and spiritual exodus from Haran to Canaan was fraught with larger meaning: "Therefore, eternity was our covering and our rock and our salvation, as we journeyed from Haran . . . to the land of Canaan" (Abr. 2:16). As everyone from Moses to Lehi and from Brigham Young to Mircea Eliade and Joseph Campbell has pointed out, something about the journey motif resonates in the human soul and suggests particular and universal meanings for us all. We are, after all, a bunch of pilgrims, strangers, and wanderers—and the journey motif replicates not only our individual and collective treks through mortality as, with E.T., we cry out and long for "home"; it traces, as well, our individual journeyings unto Christ, our learning to sing "Babylon, Babylon, we bid thee farewell."¹

Perhaps that is why this remarkable trilogy (or triptych) of photographic essays by Maurine Jensen Proctor and Scot Facer Proctor depicting three remarkable journeys has so moved this reviewer, who is usually content to leave Pero table books casually admired and generally undisturbed. In fact, I have been aesthetically and spiritually moved, and I believe most Latter-day Saint readers will likewise be moved by these felicitous combinations of truth and beauty, instruction, and delight.

The first journey, *Witness of the Light: A Photographic Journey in the Footsteps of the American Prophet Joseph Smith*,

presents “an oratorio of light on the Restoration and the life of this marvelous man, Joseph Smith” (6). Orchestrating through splendid photography and trenchant text, the Proctors recollect and replay the literal and spiritual life-journeys of the Prophet Joseph Smith Jr. They trace him from Sharon, Vermont, to Kirtland, Ohio, to the various settlements in Missouri, back to Nauvoo, and finally, Carthage, Illinois.

Scot Proctor confesses that “I don’t just research history; I try to feel it and hear it and taste it” (6) and to re-create such for a generation who did not know Joseph. Through the Proctors, “millions shall know Brother Joseph again,”² as fine photographs and text that draws upon letters, journals, diaries, and scriptural accounts place the reader on location among the Prophet’s lifelong surroundings. The Proctors thereby recollect and render, in just the right tone, the essence and larger meaning of Joseph Smith Jr.’s literal and spiritual mortal journey. They make Joseph a presence in our lives and journeyings.

The second volume in the trilogy, *Source of the Light: A Witness and Testimony of Jesus Christ, the Savior and Redeemer of All*, retraces, via photographs and prose, the journey and ministry of the most remarkable man ever—Jesus of Nazareth. Maurine Proctor’s restrained and powerful text follows Jesus’ spiritual journey by means of passages drawn from the Pearl of Great Price, the Holy Bible, the Doctrine and Covenants, the Book of Mormon, the teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, as well as ancient texts and traditions. Textually, we follow our Lord’s spiritual journey from his premortal preeminence through his prophesied annunciation, his condescension, ministry, passion, resurrection, and glorification. Photographically, we visit, in a fresh and moving way, the land made holy by his life. Scot Proctor’s lovely photographs of Israel, taken during the wettest spring in many years, are refreshingly green; and the photographs of Bethlehem are all the more intriguing because they were taken on April 6, the birthday of the Savior. In this tasteful and lovely volume, the Proctors have made the familiar and the holy somehow even more familiar and holier.

The final volume in the trilogy, *Light from the Dust: A Photographic Exploration into the Ancient World of the Book of*

Mormon, is an apparent first for Book of Mormon photobooks, which generally focus on photographic anthropological and archaeological evidence for the divine origins of the Book of Mormon. This book does not propound a thesis but assumes the divinity of the book's origins and focuses on the universality of its various messages. Furthermore, it begins its photographic odyssey in Jerusalem and the Kidron Valley, follows the ancient King's Highway through modern Jordan to the Gulf of Aquaba ("the fountain of the Red Sea" [1 Ne. 2:9]), along the Empty Quarter of the Arabian Desert to the Wadi Sayq in modern Oman, where it explores in a series of striking photographs the likely sites of Lehi's long hiatus, shipbuilding, and embarkation. From there the journey follows the Nephites and Lamanites along the western shores and inlands of Central America—principally the Mixco Viejo, Cobán, Playa Grande, and Lake Atitlán areas of Guatemala and the coastal region and Tuxtla Mountains of Southern Mexico.

Here, as in all three books, the Proctors caption the photographs by identifying the scene and by conjecturing, always with subjunctive restraint, about the role which the site, landscape feature, or artifact may have had in Book of Mormon antiquity. In identifying these prospective sites, the Proctors rely on the scholarly labors of others.

The accompanying texts are grouped in tightly written, approximately 350-word-per-page commentaries—brief essay-reflections chronicling and interpreting events occurring over four periods: "This Precious Land of Promise," "To Sing the Song of Redeeming Love," "Arise and Come Forth unto Me," and "O Ye Fair Ones, How Is It That Ye Could Have Fallen!" As in the other volumes, the text is unrelated to the accompanying photograph but explicates and teaches independently.

In this remarkable union of stunning photography and well-crafted prose, the Proctors succeed in bringing up close the distant and the ancient, in making vivid and tangible many of the events recounted in sacred history. All three of these books about remarkable literal and spiritual journeys will succeed, in fact, in evoking in the attentive fellow pilgrim a moving personal, visual, and spiritual experience.

NOTES

¹“Ye Elders of Israel,” in *Hymns of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Corporation of the President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), 319.

²“Praise to the Man,” in *Hymns*, 27.