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In the summer of 2011, a small group of recently hired faculty in the departments of Ancient Scripture and Church History and Doctrine at Brigham Young University visited LDS Church history sites in Palmyra, New York; Kirtland, Ohio; and Nauvoo, Illinois, to receive professional development training related to the origins and early history of Mormonism. During this experience, several participants (including Lincoln Blumell and Matthew Grey) became interested in the numerous points of contact between Joseph Smith and the ancient world. It seemed to us that every location presented an opportunity to discuss the inherent fascination with antiquity held by many early Latter-day Saints. In the case of Joseph Smith, this fascination began early in life and continued throughout his prophetic career as he attempted to recover ancient scripture, restore the ancient church, and bring the Latter-day Saints into communion with the sacred past. As we visited the historical sites where many of these activities transpired, we were impressed as the extraordinary range of Joseph's encounters with antiquity became increasingly apparent.

Growing up in early nineteenth-century America, Joseph Smith developed and matured in an atmosphere saturated with a biblical

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worldview, a region surrounded by Native American relics and folklore, and a world on the verge of new and exciting discoveries related to the ancient past. In this setting, Joseph Smith enthusiastically recounted stories of ancient America, translated books of ancient scripture from both the old and new worlds, received revelations relating to biblical events, and experienced visitations from biblical personalities. Over time, he and his associates attempted to study biblical languages (Hebrew, Greek, and Latin) to uncover more pristine and deeper meaning from the Bible, examined recently discovered Egyptian artifacts in order to reveal the world of the biblical patriarchs, and may have sought to reconstruct the original language of Adam. Sources indicate that early Latter-day Saints were interested in Jewish and Christian apocryphal texts, the writings of the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, and contemporary biblical commentaries. Joseph Smith in particular connected the Saints with the sacred past as he assigned ancient code names to Church leaders, gave ancient names to Mormon settlements, and revived ancient rituals associated with the biblical temple.

While visiting the historical sites and discussing these multifaceted encounters with antiquity, we felt that an academic conference and volume of essays on the topic would make a valuable contribution to our understanding of Joseph Smith's prophetic development and the origins of the Restoration. Joseph's interest in recovering ancient scripture, church organization, and religious ceremonies has always been clear, as has his belief that the study of languages, scripture, and history among the Latter-day Saints would be essential to bringing about "the salvation of Zion" (D&C 93:53). However, deeper reflection upon these issues convinced us that there was an important, dynamic, and under-explored relationship between Joseph Smith's personal interactions with ancient material and many of his unfolding revelations. Therefore, we hoped that a conference and accompanying collection of articles would help pull together some of

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the latest scholarship concerning the ancient sources to which Joseph Smith and his associates had access, the extent to which they studied those resources, and the ways in which they incorporated their findings into their larger restoration project.

Two years later that hope became a reality when the 2013 Church History Symposium at Brigham Young University focused on the theme *Approaching Antiquity: Joseph Smith and the Ancient World*. The symposium was cochaired by Lincoln Blumell and Matthew Grey of Brigham Young University and Stephen Harper and Andrew Hedges of the LDS Church History Department and included keynote addresses by Richard Lyman Bushman and David Holland. The conference was a great success as LDS scholars of various academic backgrounds—early American religious and intellectual history, Mormon scripture, biblical studies, archaeology, Jewish and early Christian studies, and Egyptology—gathered to consider aspects of this topic from different perspectives. Sessions included papers dealing with the broader study of antiquity in early America, the early Mormon interest in Native American artifacts, Joseph Smith’s interaction with the Bible, biblical languages, and contemporary biblical scholarship, the reading of non-biblical Jewish and Christian texts among early Latter-day Saints, and Joseph Smith’s work on the Egyptian documents in light of nineteenth-century Egyptology.

In addition to the remarkable breadth of topics discussed at the conference, we were impressed with the overall tone and methodological approaches shared by the presenters. In the past, most studies of “Mormons and the ancient world” seem to have fallen into one of two polarized categories. On the one hand, critics of Joseph Smith have pointed to his access (or potential access) to specific ancient sources as evidence for his willful appropriation of themes, ideas, and religious vocabulary, thus denying him any distinct religious genius and leading to charges of imaginative plagiarism. On the

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other hand, Mormon apologists have focused on parallels between Joseph Smith's writings and ancient sources to which he presumably *did not* have access as evidence for the divine revelations inspiring his restoration of ancient texts and practices. Both of these approaches, though often overly simplistic, have the potential to illuminate our understanding of Joseph Smith's work and both have advanced the academic discussions on the origins of Mormonism in important ways.

However, we believe that presenters at the *Approaching Antiquity* conference explored a critical and less dichotomous "middle ground" as they offered a more complex, sophisticated, and nuanced treatment of early Mormon intellectual history than had been previously available. Rather than scouring the sources to decisively prove either Joseph Smith's complete reliance on other sources or his complete reliance on divine revelation, the presenters carefully documented the ancient sources Joseph had at his disposal, contextualized his interaction with them in light of the contemporary intellectual climate, showed that the cultural verbiage of that climate often informed Joseph's worldview, and considered the dynamic ways in which Joseph's academic pursuits interacted with his revelatory processes. In other words, the presenters showed that Joseph Smith's intellectual curiosity and study of antiquity often worked together with his distinct prophetic genius to produce many of the scriptures, revealed doctrines, and sacred rituals of the Restoration. Such a nuanced approach allows us to consider the nature of Joseph Smith's work in a way that both responsibly evaluates the evidence and respects his prophetic activities. With what types of resources was Joseph Smith interacting and how did those resources impact his ever-expanding religious program? We believe that the papers presented at the conference—and now published in this volume—make significant strides toward clarifying these and other related questions.

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We express appreciation for the various institutions that made this important conference and published volume possible. We thank Religious Education and the Department of Church History & Doctrine at Brigham Young University, as well as the LDS Church History Department for sponsoring the conference, for providing venues to hold sessions in Provo (the BYU campus) and Salt Lake City (the LDS Conference Center), and for offering the necessary support to ensure its success. We also thank the staff at the LDS Church History Library for arranging a remarkable display of relevant artifacts to accompany the conference. These items included the Kirtland Egyptian Papers, the printing plates and extant papyri for the Book of Abraham facsimiles, some of the Hebrew Bibles and grammar books studied by early Latter-day Saints, Joseph Smith's journals (opened to the entries describing his translation of the Egyptian documents), Hyrum Smith's copy of the writings of Flavius Josephus, and other volumes about the ancient world owned by early leaders of the Church. This display was a great addition to the conference as it helped participants visualize the multifaceted encounters with antiquity in Joseph Smith's Mormonism. Finally, we thank the Religious Studies Center at Brigham Young University for making this collection of essays available to scholars and interested readers of early Latter-day Saint intellectual history. Namely, we thank publications director Thomas A. Wayment, executive editor R. Devan Jensen, production supervisor Brent R. Nordgren, and publications coordinator Joany Pinegar, as well as their team of student editors Rebecca Bird, Alison Brimley, Shanna Clayton, Rachel Gessel, Hadley Griggs, Alex Masterson, and Leah Welker.

We hope that this collection is a helpful contribution that will not serve as the final word on these topics, but rather encourage further and more serious discussion of them. Despite the vast array of issues addressed in this volume, the reader will no doubt think of other topics which could (and should) be covered in future studies,

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including the precise book holdings in the possession of Joseph Smith and his associates, the early Mormon interaction with the “ancient” rituals of folk magic and freemasonry, Joseph Smith’s vision of the Female Relief Society as restoring ancient church orders, the establishment of a museum in Nauvoo for the collection of antiquities, and a host of other related topics. We hope that this collection of essays will open the door to such studies as we continue to seek a deeper understanding of Joseph Smith’s prophetic interaction with antiquity and a deeper appreciation for his ability to bring together the past, present, and future in the latter-day Restoration.

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