The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon in the Twentieth Century

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Abstract
I hope this study, however preliminary it might appear, will provide a sound first step toward developing our self-understanding as Latter-day Saints of the history of Book of Mormon use in the twentieth century and the phenomenal increase in understanding, appreciation, and study that has taken place over the last three to four decades. This study may also offer one useful perspective for the gradually emerging history of cultural Mormonism and its antipathy to the Book of Mormon. This study is grounded in the analysis of a number of possible indicators of intensity of interest in the Book of Mormon and in a dozen interviews with people who were directly involved in some of the more significant developments of the last half century. In the absence of any readily available scale that directly measures the phenomenon I wish to illuminate, I have collected a number of measures which would intuitively seem to be directly linked to it. These include statistical summaries of Book of Mormon references or citations in LDS literature and general conference addresses, as well as counts of publications related to the Book of Mormon. Almost no comparative statistical analyses have been attempted because of the incommensurability of the various indicators.

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The Book of Mormon is a sacred text of the Latter Day Saint movement, which, according to Latter Day Saint theology, contains writings of ancient prophets who lived on the American continent from approximately 2200 BC to AD 421. It was first published in March 1830 by Joseph Smith as The Book of Mormon: An Account Written by the Hand of Mormon upon Plates Taken from the Plates of Nephi. The Book of Mormon is the earliest of the unique writings of the Latter Day Saint movement, the denominations of The Book of Mormon comprises 15 books, each allegedly written by an ancient American prophet. It professes to be a religious and secular history of Hebrews who fled Jerusalem and certain persecution in 600 B.C. Lehi, an alleged prophet and contemporary of Jeremiah, led his wife, children, and their spouses through the Arabian wilderness to the shores of “the large waters.” Some of their prophets predicted the coming forth of the Book of Mormon and the establishing in America of the New Jerusalem. The forces of good and evil ultimately arrayed themselves in a final battle. The Book of Mormon story ends early in the fifth century. By the fourth century war and carnage had consumed both the faithful Nephites and the reprobate Lamanites.