

Newell G. Bringhurst and Craig L. Foster, eds. *The Persistence of Polygamy: Joseph Smith and the Origins of Mormon Polygamy*. Independence, Mo., John Whitmer Books, 2010. 320 pp. Cloth; \$39.95.

Newell G. Bringhurst and Craig L. Foster, eds. *The Persistence of Polygamy: From Joseph Smith's Martyrdom to the First Manifesto, 1844–1890*. Independence, Mo., John Whitmer Books, 2013, 388 pp. Cloth; \$39.95.

*Reviewed by Dave Hall*

In the afterword of the first in this three volume series on Mormon polygamy, historian Jessie L. Embry reflected on her own work that resulted in the 1987 publication of *Mormon Polygamous Families: Life in the Principle*. Back then, Embry recalled, she had thought she was writing the last word on the subject. A series of subsequent publications soon disabused her. Polygamy seems to be a topic of perpetual interest in Mormon history that regularly draws the attention of scholars. The two volumes of essays considered here are but among the more recent of such treatments. Editors Newell G. Bringhurst and Craig L. Foster bring together a somewhat eclectic but nonetheless informative group of writings that manage to contribute significantly to our understanding of polygamy's origins in Mormonism (volume one) and its practice from 1844 until the Manifesto of 1890 when it was publicly (at least) repudiated by Wilford Woodruff, LDS president (volume two). Each essay in the collection treats its topics in light of relevant recent scholarship, sometimes challenging previous conclusions and at other times fleshing out details to enrich our understanding of polygamy's nuances.

The first volume begins with a helpful foreword by Linda King Newell, who immediately points out one of its significant omissions—the neglect of the perspective of the women affected by the practice. But as Newell also notes, the essays that follow provide the reader “with an increased understanding of the complexity of the doctrine,” as well as “a healthy skepticism for glibly drawn conclusions” (xiv). After an introduction by Bringhurst and Foster, the first of these essays, by Don Bradley, presents an exhaustive consideration of Joseph Smith's relationship in Kirtland with Fanny Alger, long reputed to be Smith's first plural wife. This is followed in separate essays by editors Bringhurst and Foster that explore the role

of what becomes Doctrine and Covenants section 132 (in the current LDS edition) in bringing forth the practice. In Foster's case, he also frames introduction of plural marriage within the context of Smith's expanding concept of family. Brian Hales then explores and seeks to reassess Smith's polyandry in a strongly argued piece. More than one of the essays left me wishing that the authors had better positioned their arguments within the broader historical literature concerning the era, especially in regard to marriage practices. Yet that very issue—historical context—was at the heart of two pieces, both of them examining the early age of marriage among women in polygamy. Craig Foster, David Keller, and Gregory L. Smith argue that early marriage among females was fairly common in the United States at the time, placing Mormon polygamous examples well within this general pattern. Todd Compton, on the other hand, uses different methodology and data to argue the opposite and further to show that polygamy continued to significantly drive down marriage age among women in polygamous unions after the Mormon move to Utah. Ugo Perego turns to the science of DNA analysis to explore and generally refute the possible paternity of Joseph Smith among several children attributed to him (dashing some long-held popular notions), while Newell Bringhurst explores the reaction to, and rejection of, the revelation on plural marriage by the Reorganized LDS Church.

The second volume begins with a foreword by the late historian B. Carmon Hardy that nicely highlights how the essays contribute to the literature of polygamy. Brigham Young, not surprisingly, is the focus of several essays. Jeffrey Ogden Johnson pulls back the curtain on Young's household, which, despite its unusual nature (even within the context of polygamy), looks surprisingly Victorian as far as the relations between family members are concerned. George D. Smith, on the other hand, discusses what he sees as a distinct ambivalence on Young's part toward polygamy and considers some seemingly misogynistic strains in Young's rhetoric as well, despite his many wives. Connell O'Donovan sheds light on a different topic, arguing that there are links between the unusual and unsanctioned polygamous practices of some early black converts and Young's subsequent denial of the priesthood to African Americans. Newell Bringhurst considers the purposeful avoidance of any discussions or even acknowledgment of Young's many wives in Latter-day Saint official literature, while Craig Foster examines the polygamous wives of Mormon Church presidents from Young through the last polygamist among them, Heber J. Grant. Polygamy among Mormon splinter groups after Smith's death are the topics of two essays by Vickie Cleverly Speek and Christopher Blythe, and, in an age when alternate realities seem increasingly the norm in a polarized nation, it is appropriate that Brian Hales reviews the struggle to construct Joseph Smith's legacy in relation to polygamy by LDS and RLDS churches. His essay reveals that

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the attempts by Joseph Smith III to prove his father was not involved in the practice energized his cousin Joseph F. Smith and others in the Utah church to preserve evidence that would otherwise have been lost to history. Meanwhile, Lewis M. Weigand examines the surprising cases of polygamists who then turned from the practice to unite with the RLDS faith.

Linda Newell's criticism in the first volume concerning the absence of women is rectified somewhat in this second volume by two essays. The first, by Andrea G. Radke-Moss, synthesizes, analyzes, and extends the conclusions of existing literature to illuminate the seemingly contradictory link between polygamy and Mormon women's activism in the latter nineteenth century. Lorie Winder Stromberg's essay reminds readers of some of the women who were jailed to coerce their cooperation with federal officials during the antipolygamy raid from 1882–90. The volume concludes with Richard P. Howard's discussion of the surprising shift in the RLDS church, so long in denial of Smith's polygamy, to accept polygamists in India into its membership, a consequence of the denomination's far-flung missionary activities in the area during the latter twentieth-century.

Other than wishing for a bit more historical context at times regarding the social scene into which Mormon polygamy emerged, like Linda Newell, the thing for which I most longed in these collections was more extensive consideration of the perspective of women. An essay shedding light on Emma Smith, or the other wives of early polygamists, would have been a welcome addition, for example. Of course, these essays are not meant to be a comprehensive treatment or even a broad overview of the topic. If you are looking for that you would be well served to turn first to the works of Jessie Embry, Richard van Wagonen, Carmon Hardy, Kathryn Daynes, Todd Compton, or a number of others. And for women and the practice, Laurel Thatcher Ulrich's recent extensive treatment, *A House Full of Females*, would be a good place to start. Yet, such general works often leave readers with lots of "yes, but what about . . ." questions. These two volumes go a long way toward addressing many of them. As Embry noted in her afterword of the first volume, the studies here will surely not be the last word on the topic. But to my mind, the reader will find that they make significant contributions to our understanding of Mormon polygamy and the religious tradition that gave rise to it. In so doing, these volumes represent a valuable addition to the literature.

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