Harold B. Lee Library

Ancient Studies Collection Development Policy and Philosophy

Latter-day Saint culture, founded in the restored Gospel of Jesus Christ, has an inherent interest in understanding the thinking of all of God’s children, past, present, and future, particularly thinking that may reflect God’s inspiration and revelation. In order to fully understand the Gospel we need to think about and learn from those who communicated their thinking in the past, including those who may have lived their lives without a full understanding of the Gospel. We believe they may have received inspiration from God, too, and we have an interest in finding out how they may have been inspired. Further, in order to understand the present we need to be able to see the patterns of the past, and this involves understanding the thinking of the ancients. The remnants of the past are spiritually important to us. It really matters that we know what took place in the past among God’s children, in all cultures, including those that are quite different from our own. We are taught that from the time of Adam “a book of remembrance was kept,” and “it was given unto as many as called upon God to write by the spirit of inspiration” (Moses 6:5). The children of God have been record keepers from the beginning and there is no reason to suppose that these records only existed among the writings and cultures that eventually contributed to the canonized scriptures as we know them today.

Before the Church was founded, in 1829, the Lord commanded:

Study *my word which hath gone forth among the children of men*, and also study my word *which shall come forth* among the children of men, or that which is now translating, yea, *until you have obtained all which I shall grant unto the children of men in this generation*, and then shall all things be added thereto (Doctrine and Covenants 11:22)

This commandment does not limit this seeking behavior to formally canonized scripture; indeed we are to seek until we have obtained “all”, and the implication is that we are to seek far and wide for this knowledge, in addition to seeking within the scriptures themselves. This is made explicit elsewhere: “And set in order the churches, and study and learn, and become acquainted with all good books, and with languages, tongues, and people” (Doctrine and Covenants 90:15), and, “as all have not faith, seek ye diligently and teach one another words of wisdom; yea, seek ye *out of the best books* words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith” (Doctrine and Covenants 88:118 [1832/1833], repeated verbatim in Doctrine and Covenants 109:7 [1836]). In the same revelation given in Section 88, obtained when the Lord was asked “to reveal his will unto us concerning the upbuilding of Zion,” God reveals the breadth of study he expects of his followers: “of things both in heaven and in the earth, and under the earth; things which have been, things which are, things which must shortly come to pass; things which are at home, things which are abroad; the wars and the perplexities of the nations, and the judgments which are on the land; and a knowledge also of countries and of kingdoms, that ye may be prepared in all things …” (Doctrine and Covenants 88:79-80).

This divinely-commanded information-seeking behavior is severely handicapped if the resources containing the information—the good books, languages, tongues, and people—are not available to the seeker. The goal of the great libraries of the world has always been to build collections that will permit the seeker to find. The LDS Church has built a number of great libraries for this purpose. The Church History Library is focused on the collection of materials enabling an understanding of the history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The Brigham Young University Library collection is more generally focused.

Within the Brigham Young University Library the Ancient Studies Collection focuses on the past, the “things which have been”. It is currently focused on the western (Greek and Roman) and middle-eastern portions of the ancient world because that is where Judeo-Christian religion culture initially took hold and developed.[[1]](#footnote-1) It aims to preserve the words and thoughts of human beings of the past, and therefore its chief focus is to collect primary texts and records (including art) from the ancient world in Greek, Latin, other languages used by early Christians (e.g. Syriac, Coptic), Hebrew, Egyptian, and other languages from the ancient middle East (e.g. Akkadian). The Ancient Studies Collection also contains a selection of secondary materials needed to interpret the primary materials (e.g. dictionaries, grammars, etc.). The Collection is open to anyone wishing to use it, but it is kept in a semi-secure area and is generally non-circulating because of its purpose, the preservation of the texts, so that they will remain available to future students as well as current.

The writings and other records that are the focus of the Ancient Studies Collection were created long before the advent of printing and modern publishing practices. They were written down by hand one copy at a time on parchment, papyrus, paper, stone, or other materials, and then copied over and over again as the original materials deteriorated or more copies were needed. In general, the only evidence we have of these ancient works is manuscript copies that survive to the present. Some of these managed to survive from the time they were originally created (e.g., documentary papyri found in situ in Egypt), but most survive only through multiple generations of copies. For many works this process resulted in a proliferation of manuscript copies, all of which differ from one another to a greater or lesser extent. Over the last two to three centuries a specialized field of study called textual criticism has developed with the purpose of taking this manuscript (and other) evidence and attempting to discern the author’s original text. As this field of study continues to develop, and as new evidence for texts is discovered, our knowledge and understanding of the actual words of these ancient authors is developing and improving as new editions are published. The Ancient Studies Collection aims to collect the best editions of the works within its focus and is therefore a growing collection.

The Collection comprises both literary works (e.g., Homer’s *Iliad*) and documentary (non-literary) works (e.g. the published results of papyrus and epigraphic finds).

Publishing an edition of a given text may occur as a single volume by a scholar, but most often publication occurs within several large series of critical editions emanating from scholarly publishers worldwide. The Collection has standing orders to most of these (see the Ancient Studies Library Guide under “The Collection” <http://guides.lib.byu.edu/c.php?g=216370&p=1428559>).

The collection also actively collects papyrological and epigraphic texts (texts preserved on papyri or inscribed in stone) as editions are published, based on *Checklist of Editions of Greek, Latin, Demotic, and Coptic Papyri, Ostraca, and Tablets* (<http://papyri.info/docs/checklist>) and *Guide de l’épigraphiste*, 4th edition (<http://www.antiquite.ens.fr/ressources/publications-aux-p-e-n-s/guide-de-l-epigraphiste/article/overview>).

As with other collecting areas within the Library, collection development for the Ancient Studies Collection takes account of research and curricular interests of BYU faculty and students, but given the strong Gospel interest in maintaining and developing a collection representing the thought, work, and history of the human family in the ancient world, the Collection is not entirely driven by research and curricular interests, which may fluctuate over time.

1. Since all of God’s dealings with human beings did not take place in the Mediterranean area it would make sense in the future to consider expanding the collection to include ancient primary sources from places like Meso-America, Asia, and Africa. These are not the current focus of the collection. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)