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INSIGHTS

The Newsletter of the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship

IN THIS ISSUE

Dead Sea Scrolls Topic of New Volume, page 2
“What’s the Competition?,” page 3
Egyptian Desert Syriac Manuscripts, page 4
New *FARMS Review*, page 5

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The Maxwell Institute makes every effort to keep most of the books we produce and publish, either on our own or with others, in print. At the same time, we face increasing costs to do this. Many of our recent books (and all of our periodicals) are available digitally, and we are working to ensure that our past titles will be available both digitally and in print. In the future our publications, including our periodicals, will come out in both formats.

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this initial print run is depleted, we will no longer reprint titles.

Instead, we have instituted a system whereby all of our out-of-print books and periodicals will be available via print on demand. These titles will be similar to the original printed versions, but the unit price will be higher. As always, we will make every effort to keep these prices as low as possible.

Watch for further details on this (and related developments in digital printing) in subsequent issues of *Insights* and on our website, maxwellinstitute.byu.edu.

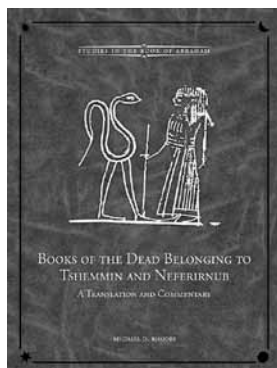
Also, please let me take this opportunity to thank you again for your support over the years. Many of you have subscribed to one or more of our periodicals for more than 25 years, and we very much appreciate it. ♦

M. Gerald Bradford
Executive Director



Two New Volumes Added to Book of Abraham Series

Two new volumes in the Studies in the Book of Abraham series emphasize the Maxwell Institute’s continued interest in advancing research on the Book of Abraham and will offer scholars and others useful tools for their study.



Books of the Dead Belonging to Tshemmin and Neferirnub: A Translation and Commentary

Volume 4 of the series is the second of two volumes that deal with the surviving Joseph Smith Papyri fragments. The subject of the first volume was *The Hor Book of Breathings*. This second volume deals with the

remaining fragments that consist of Books of the Dead belonging to two women—Tshemmin and Neferirnub.

Books of the Dead contains a detailed description of the papyri as well as a transcription, translation, and commentary of all the surviving text. The appendixes include color plates with hieroglyphic transcriptions of the hieratic text, a glossary of gods, place-names, and a complete glossary of all Egyptian words found in the surviving text.

The editor of this volume, Michael D. Rhodes, is an associate research professor in the Department of Ancient Scripture at Brigham Young University. He is coauthor of *One Eternal Round*, the last volume in the Collected Works of Hugh Nibley series.

A Textual History of the Book of Abraham: Manuscripts and Editions

In July 1835 at Kirtland, Ohio, a traveling antiquities dealer brought four Egyptian mummies and several rolls of papyri to Joseph Smith. Upon

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inspection, the Prophet pronounced that one of the rolls contained a lost record of the patriarch Abraham. After purchasing these artifacts for \$2,400, he translated the papyri and published five chapters entitled “The Book of Abraham” in March 1842 in the *Times and Seasons*. These chapters are now canonized scripture found in the Pearl of Great Price.



This volume includes a brief introduction to the Book of Abraham and a detailed record of textual variants from the time it first appeared in the *Times*

and *Seasons* until its latest edition (1981). In addition, it produces for the first time typographic transcriptions with facing grayscale images of the surviving handwritten manuscripts of the Book of Abraham. Several appendixes offer additional helpful resources such as contemporary accounts related to the translation of the Book of Abraham and a full set of high-resolution color images of the surviving Abraham manuscripts.

Brian M. Hauglid is editor of this volume. He is associate professor of ancient scripture at BYU and coeditor for the Studies in the Book of Abraham series.

Both volumes are available for purchase at www.byubookstore.com. ♦



Dead Sea Scrolls Is Topic of New Volume

Volume 2 (2010) of *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* promises to be a significant contribution to the ongoing Latter-day Saint scholarly conversation on the Dead Sea Scrolls. This volume features essays from Donald W. Parry, Dana M. Pike, and Andrew C. Skinner, all of whom have served on the international team of editors of the Dead Sea Scrolls and have helped produce several of the 40 volumes in the Discoveries in the Judaean Desert series.

In “The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible: Overview and Significance,” Donald W. Parry introduces readers to the scrolls as they relate to the Hebrew Bible, nonbiblical texts, and the sectarian documents. He explores particularly the significance of the scrolls for our understanding of scribal transmission, variant readings between the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Masoretic text of the Hebrew Bible, and how the Dead Sea Scrolls sectarians understood scripture. Parry’s article provides an important discussion of these topics from an LDS scholarly perspective.

One of the challenges for Latter-day Saints curious about the Dead Sea Scrolls is finding accurate information. In “The Dead Sea Scrolls and Latter-day Saints: Where Do We Go from Here?” Dana M. Pike argues that too many Latter-day Saints rely on outdated information and flawed

methodologies. Pike gives several suggestions for countering misinformation and keeping up to date. He also proposes a framework for approaching the Dead Sea Scrolls within their proper historical, textual, and religious contexts.

Andrew C. Skinner sheds light on the connection between the Dead Sea Scrolls and first-century Christianity in “The Dead Sea Scrolls and the World of Jesus.” Skinner takes a measured and cautious approach in exploring certain parallels between the scrolls and the earliest Christian texts, such as similar terminology and phrasing, temple ideology, and messianic expectations.

Also included is a reprint of Hugh Nibley’s “From the Dead Sea Scrolls (1QS),” which first appeared in 1975 as appendix 1 to *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri*. Nibley’s article provides a good example of how Latter-day Saints have found the scrolls compelling for their resonances with our own religious tradition. Stephen D. Ricks supplies a new introduction to this reprint.

Finally, this volume of *Studies* contains an updated select bibliography of publications by Latter-day Saint scholars on the Dead Sea Scrolls.

In conjunction with the publication of this volume, a Dead Sea Scrolls conference was held on January 12, 2011, at BYU, at which Parry, Pike, and Skinner presented their papers.

Studies in the Bible and Antiquity is available for purchase at www.byubookstore.com. ♦

Dead Sea Scrolls: What's the Competition?

William Foxwell Albright (1891-1971), perhaps the greatest biblical scholar of the 20th century, stated quite matter-of-factly that the Dead Sea Scrolls are “the greatest manuscript discovery of modern times.” Such oft-quoted statements as this may well both explain and help create the enormous and sustained interest in the scrolls. Certainly the current issue of *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* shows in numerous large and small ways why the scrolls are important, particularly for the study of the Bible, and gives a better appreciation of the varieties of Judaism in the world of Jesus Christ, thus confirming Albright's claim for another generation of scholars, students, and general readers.

There is, however, another possible response to Albright's statement, and that is to ask, “What's the competition?” It is only natural to want to know who the other finalists in the beauty pageant of modern manuscript discoveries might possibly be. It's a question worth thinking about, because on reflection there are quite a few candidates. Hugh Nibley, for example, gave us a list of 20 finalists. Space permits us to consider only two other finds that might deserve a place on the podium on either side of the Dead Sea Scrolls. As a scholar of early Christianity, I would select as my finalists the library of the Monastery of the Syrians in Egypt (one that didn't make Nibley's list) and the ancient Christian library found at Nag Hammadi.

The most recent text from the Monastery of the Syrians to hit the headlines is the so-called *Revelation of the Magi*. The manuscript of this text was preserved in the kind climate (for books) of the Egyptian desert for nearly a thousand years before being purchased by the Vatican Library in the early 18th century. In fact, almost all of the manuscripts from this monastery were purchased by great libraries in Europe—principally the Vatican Library and the British Library—during the period of European “discovery” of Middle Eastern manuscripts (Christian, Jewish, and Islamic). The library of the Monastery of the

Syrians is unique, though, mostly thanks to an enterprising abbot called Moses of Nisibis, who was a bibliophile and collector of ancient books—in the 10th century AD this abbot was purchasing books that were already 500 years old! The library possessed many unique works, including such treasures as the world's oldest dated manuscript (AD 411), Syriac translations of otherwise lost Greek works, and even a lost ancient translation of the New Testament into the Syriac language. Though the original owners of the monastery could read the manuscripts in the library, the monastery later came into the hands of the local Coptic church, and the library fell into neglect and disuse. Recent exciting discoveries continue to draw the attention of the scholarly world. (See the article by Carl Griffin in this issue for more on this collection.)

In December 1945, just before the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, 13 ancient codices (fourth-fifth century AD) were discovered near the town of Nag Hammadi in Upper Egypt. The exciting story of this accidental discovery is only eclipsed by the remarkable texts contained within these codices, texts that scholars date back to the earliest centuries of the New Testament. Where the Dead Sea Scrolls expose the varieties of Jewish practice in the age of Jesus, these Nag Hammadi texts expose the competing Christianities that vied for adherents in the first centuries after Jesus. New gospels promise the “secret words” of the “living Jesus,” other books claim to contain the teachings of the first disciples of Jesus, such as the *Secret Book of James*. Hugh Nibley has mined these texts and the fruits are found scattered in his collected works. However, there is further interesting work to be done on this important collection.

The Dead Sea Scrolls certainly deserve our attention and interest, as this issue of *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* shows so well. However, it is only the tip of a very exciting iceberg of ancient texts. ♦

By Kristian S. Heal

Director of the Center for the Preservation of Ancient Religious Texts

Syriac Manuscripts from the Egyptian Desert

The birthplace and spiritual heart of Christian monasticism is the Nitrian Desert of Egypt and the long, shallow valley of Scetis (Wadi el-Natrun). It was to here, from the fourth century onwards, that Macarius the Great and others of the sainted desert fathers retreated from the world, devoting their lives to worship and prayer. While some monks chose to live in isolation as hermits, many others banded together to establish the first monasteries, building churches for worship and libraries for study.

These monastic libraries collected many manuscripts and the dry climate of Egypt preserved them well. In fact, most of the premedieval Christian manuscripts we have today come from Egypt. While many texts were written in Greek or Egyptian (Coptic), monks of all nations flocked to Egypt and brought with them books in their own languages. Regrettably, Scetis suffered from violent incursions, and a series of five raids from 407 to 817 repeatedly plundered the monasteries of their few treasures, including books. Each time the monks rebuilt and, as best they might, refilled their libraries.

Notes added to manuscripts often explained their provenance and history. According to certain of these notes, in perhaps the eighth or early ninth century a wealthy and important Christian named Marutha visited one of the monasteries and asked to see monks from his homeland. Marutha's family was from Takrit in Iraq, a center of Syriac Christianity, and was prominent in a Takritan trade community located in Egypt. Marutha was disheartened to hear that the Syriac-speaking monks were scattered over many monasteries. In a pious act, he purchased for 12,000 gold dinars an unused monastery for these monks to have as their own. This became the Monastery of the Syrians (Deir al-Suriani).

If this account of the monastery's founding is correct,¹ Marutha almost certainly would have endowed this monastery with Syriac books. But if he did, none survived the fifth sack of Scetis in 817 by Arab marauders. In fact, so devastating were these raids that almost no Syriac manuscripts brought to Scetis before 817 survive. One exception is a copy of the homilies of Severus, patriarch of Antioch, who was greatly revered by many of the

Egyptian monks. This manuscript was purchased by an abbot named Theodore, which "he bought together with others for the study, reading and spiritual progress of all those who shall read it."² It dates to AD 576 and is now preserved in the Vatican Apostolic Library (Vat. Syr. 142).

This manuscript somehow survived the Arab raids and made its way to the new Monastery of the Syrians. Many others were donated by Takritans like Marutha or brought by monks relocating from other monasteries. But the most ancient and valuable of the manuscripts in the monastery's great library were acquired through one monk's initiative and good fortune.

The abbot Moses of Nisibis was a great pastor and administrator who prospered his monastery. When a Muslim vizier tried to levy an onerous poll tax on bishops, monks, and infirm Christians in Egypt, Moses went to Baghdad to petition the caliph for relief. For five years (927-32) he engaged in this appeal, and while waiting upon the caliph's good pleasure, he also toured extensively the monasteries of Mesopotamia and northern Syria.

Moses was a lover of books, so he used these visits to acquire volumes for his monastery library. When at last he returned to Egypt, his appeal successful, he brought back with him great treasures of learning—250 manuscripts. Many were purchased, while others were gifts. As impressive as this number is, his acquisitions were important also for their antiquity. The great majority of surviving pre-eighth-century Syriac manuscripts, preserving many rare and important works, once belonged to Moses's library. Their value to scholars today is inestimable.

Subsequent abbots continued to acquire manuscripts. The precise number is unknown. One early European visitor to Scetis reported seeing a great library, quite likely that of the Syrians, containing about 8,000 volumes. This is certainly an exaggeration, but even a tenth of that number would have been an impressive collection. A 17th-century inventory reported 403 bound volumes, but many volumes would have contained multiple manuscripts. And this did not include fragments, which accumulated in considerable quantity. In 1837, Robert Curzon visited the monastery and found a neglected, stone-vaulted closet "which was filled to the depth of two feet or more with the loose leaves of the

Syriac manuscripts.”³ While the exact number is not known, more than 1,500 manuscripts have survived to our day from the Monastery of the Syrians.

Western travelers and institutions acquired the majority of the monastery’s Syriac manuscripts during the 17th to 19th centuries, at times by way of honest purchase and at times, sadly, by some measure of bribery and fraud. They are preserved today in Berlin, London, Paris, Rome, and elsewhere. By far the greatest number are in the British Library. Between 1835 and 1851, almost 550 complete and fragmentary manuscripts were acquired by the British from the Monastery of the Syrians.

But more than a century earlier, in 1707, the Vatican Library sent a young Lebanese Syrian (Maronite) priest named Elias Assemani to the Middle East in search of Syriac manuscripts. He first went to Egypt and succeeded in obtaining a number of manuscripts from the Monastery of the Syrians. The precise number is uncertain, for while transporting them by boat to Cairo, a storm arose that capsized the vessel, sending all the manuscripts to the bottom of the Nile and drowning one monk. Elias hired divers to retrieve his treasures from the muddy river bottom and dried them out as best he might, but our only account of the catastrophe reports that “many folios [pages] of them were lost.”⁴ One Arabic and 33 Syriac manuscripts later arrived at Rome. Whether just portions of those manuscripts were lost, or some volumes in their entirety, is unknown.

While parts are rendered unreadable by water damage, those 33 manuscripts are some of the most ancient and valuable Syriac manuscripts surviving today. Clearly Elias was permitted to handpick gems from the monastery library. In 1715 his uncle Joseph Simon Assemani returned to the monastery and selected another 100 for purchase. However, negotiations with the monks failed, and he was able to purchase only “a few.” Again, precisely how

many is unknown, but of the estimated 50 Syriac manuscripts Joseph Simon acquired for the Vatican Library, nine certainly came from the Syrian Monastery. These include the only surviving copy of the earliest Syriac chronicle (ca. 540), among other rarities. Scholars have determined that yet others of the Syrian Monastery’s manuscripts were acquired by the Vatican Library, previous to the Assemanis, but precisely how is not always known.

In 2005 the Maxwell Institute’s Center for the Preservation of Ancient Religious Texts published *Syriac Manuscripts from the Vatican Library, Volume 1*, reproducing 33 Syriac manuscripts from the Vatican collection. These include 16 manuscripts known to be from the Monastery of the Syrians, and at least two others that may be. This DVD is still available for purchase at the BYU Bookstore. Further work on the Vatican Library Syriac collection is now in the initial stages of planning. ♦

By Carl Griffin

Associate Director of the Center for the Preservation of Ancient Religious Texts

Notes

1. Its historicity was advocated by Evelyn-White, but no corroborating evidence survives, and recent research by Van Rompay and Schmidt have called it seriously into question. See Hugh G. Evelyn-White, *The Monasteries of the Wadi ‘n Natrûn*, ed. Walter Hauser (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, Egyptian Expedition, 1926–33), 2:312–18; and Lucas Van Rompay and Andrea B. Schmidt, “Takritans in the Egyptian Desert: The Monastery of the Syrians in the Ninth Century,” *Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies* 1 (2001): 41–60.

2. As cited in Evelyn-White, *Monasteries*, 2:320.

3. As cited in William Wright, *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum Acquired since the Year 1838* (London: British Museum, Dept. of Oriental Printed Books and Manuscripts, 1870–72), 3:ix.

4. This account does not come from Elias himself, but from his uncle Joseph Simon. J. S. Assemanus, *Bibliotheca orientalis Clementino-Vaticana, I* (Rome: Typis Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide, 1719), preface, section VII; S. E. Assemanus and J. S. Assemanus, *Bibliothecae Apostolicae Vaticanae codicum manuscriptorum catalogus, I, 3* (Rome: Typographia linguarum orientalium, 1759), 77.

Latest Review Takes Up Church Media, Promised Land, Teen Religiosity, and More

The latest issue of the *FARMS Review* (volume 22, number 2), which appeared at the end of 2010, features a transcript of last year’s Neal A.

Maxwell Lecture given by Mark H. Willes, president and CEO of Deseret Management Corporation. Willes illustrates the kind of creative thinking required for the LDS Church’s media outlets to eventually reach hundreds of millions of people worldwide. For a full report of this lecture, see *Insights* 30/2 (2010).

Five essays deal with the Book of Mormon. Two are reviews of Bruce H. Porter and Rod L. Meldrum's book *Prophecies and Promises: The Book of Mormon and the United States*. This book holds that Book of Mormon events took place in the central and eastern United States and that the Book of Mormon prophecies about the land of promise refer exclusively to the United States. In two separate reviews, Matthew Roper shows why the "heartland theory" is untenable. The first takes up several key issues such as what Joseph Smith knew about Book of Mormon geography through revelation and whether his use of certain terms like "this land" supports only a limited North American setting. The second review addresses the authors' narrow interpretation of the terms "land of promise" and "remnant of Lehi."

An essay by Robert F. Smith demonstrates that several letters in the Book of Mormon adhere to a subtle yet significant feature of ancient Near Eastern epistolary form that was unknown in Joseph Smith's day. He also refers to research suggesting that professional bilingual Israelite scribes since the 10th century BC had been using hieratic (short-hand) Egyptian, which developed separately from the Egyptian tradition. In his discussion of territorial symbolism in the Book of Mormon and how it informs the book's covenantal theology, Steven L. Olsen asserts that the concept of a promised land is best understood not so much as a specific location but as "places where sacred covenants govern human relations and where the blessings of the gospel are realized by covenant-based communities" (p. 153).

Readers desiring perspective on the ongoing Book of Mormon historicity debate will find it in Kevin Christensen's assessment of one writer's series of criticisms nearly three decades ago. Christensen shows how subsequent developments have vindicated the Book of Mormon and teach a cautionary lesson about keeping a broader perspective that can accommodate revised assumptions and conclusions.

John Gee mines the data from two books by evangelical sociologists on the influence of religion in the lives of "emerging adults" (college-aged youth). The findings are from a 2005 study of U.S. youth and religion (in which LDS teenagers were ranked highest "in a variety of sociological measures of religious vitality and salience," p. 195) and

also from follow-up studies of the same group. Gee cites the statistics on religious devotion, alcohol consumption, and promiscuity and offers insightful commentary. He concludes with a list of behaviors typical among Latter-day Saints that "seem to correlate most closely to faith playing an important role in an emerging adult's life" (p. 228).

In the editor's introduction, Daniel C. Peterson opines on the Christian (and therefore LDS) obligation to "apologize"—that is, believers' individual responsibility to defend the faith's truth-claims through evidence and reason. He distinguishes between positive and negative apologetics (i.e., affirmatively advocating vs. rebutting and defending), argues that the former requires no special training or expertise to demonstrate that the gospel is desirable, and points to the Internet as a convenient and effective means of doing that.

Peterson also notes that this issue marks the end of the *FARMS Review* title. The next issue of this publication will bear the title *Mormon Studies Review*, which, according to Peterson, reflects "the periodical's expanded vision and scope" as well as "readjustments over the past several years in . . . the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship." This issue is available for purchase at www.byubookstore.com. ♦

INSIGHTS

The Newsletter of the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship

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By furthering religious scholarship through the study of scripture and other texts, Brigham Young University's Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship seeks to deepen understanding and nurture discipleship among Latter-day Saints while promoting mutual respect and goodwill among people of all faiths.



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