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METI Volume Highlights Education

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familiarity with the literary styles and techniques witnessed throughout the Old Testament. ♦

By Pedro Olavarria

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Notes

1. Stephen D. Ricks and John A. Tvedtnes, "The Hebrew Origin of Some Book of Mormon Place Names," *JBMS* 6/2 (1997): 259.

2. See Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, eds., *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1906), Accordance Bible Software, DVD, 3.0.

3. Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament; Study Edition* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 1:328.

4. Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 282.

5. See Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to Its Techniques* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1984), 244.

6. As translated in *Tanakh: A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures According to the Traditional Text* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1985), 1000.

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Consider this picture: A sandy courtyard somewhere on the outskirts of a desert village. A group of boys—ages perhaps 8 to 16—are gathered outside



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the entrance to a simple, well-worn little building. They are seated or kneeling in the sand, huddled in the last vestiges of the late morning shade. Each holds a text or a tablet. Some are reading, some are looking out to where the pale sky meets a broken line of rooftops and trees, reciting, in a quiet murmur to themselves, the words of the book they are holding. Some gently rock back and forth as they read, letting the cadence of their movement compliment the rhythm of the words on the page. Others are writing on tablets of slate or wood. These writers are likewise engaged in the exercise of recitation, but with the pen, setting down line after line from memory. One boy uncrosses his legs, stands up, and steps toward a man who is seated on a little chair in front of the group. As the boy steps forward, his teacher rises and the boy presents his tablet to him. It is written front and back in neat lines of Arabic. Both the teacher and the boy are careful not to smudge the words on the slate. They are sacred words, revealed to a prophet named Muhammad long ago in Mecca, a town on the western edge of Arabia, toward which they have both been praying every day since they were very young.

This is an almost timeless scene, one that has been played out in countless places from Morocco to Syria virtually every day for nearly 14 centuries. It is an enduring picture of Islamic education at its most basic level—the beginning of literacy by learning Qur'an.

Education has always been an important pursuit in Islam. It was fostered for many reasons and at many levels. There were itinerant teachers who taught the fundamental tenets of the faith in exchange for lodging and other services, there were Qur'anic schools, often associated with the mosques, where masters of the Qur'an gathered a circle of pupils and tutored them, and there were centers of higher learning at Baghdad, Damascus, Alexandria, and elsewhere, where Islamic theology and jurisprudence were developed and taught.

Given the scope and intensity of Islamic educational efforts, it is not surprising that much was written on the subject from both theoretical and practical points of view. In a soon-to-be released volume from the Maxwell Institute's Middle Eastern Texts Initiative, Bradley J. Cook, with assistance from Fathi H. Malkawi, has drawn together and introduced selections from the writings of eminent Islamic thinkers, presenting them in a dual-language format for the first time. Each piece in *Classical Foundations of Islamic Educational Thought* has been translated and annotated by a respected scholar of classical Arabic literature. Together, these texts are a trove of information about the way education has been approached in the classical Islamic tradition. There is much here of relevance to modern educators who are interested in carrying forward that tradition even as new technologies and social realities impact the learning environment. And there is much for all to appreciate about a faith tradition that enjoined its followers to "seek learning, even unto China."

For more information about this and other titles in the Islamic Translation Series, visit meti.byu.edu. ♦

By D. Morgan Davis

Director, Middle Eastern Texts Initiative