



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

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# INSIGHTS

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

## IN THIS ISSUE

Update: Book of Mormon Swords, page 2

New FARMS Review, page 4

Bradford New Institute Director, page 5

Volume 28  
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## Maxwell Institute to Sponsor Presentations at Education Week

The Maxwell Institute is pleased to sponsor a series of presentations at Brigham Young University Campus Education Week, slated for August 19–22, 2008, in Provo, Utah. These presentations, given by members of the Institute’s administration and associated scholars, represent a range of the work done by the Maxwell Institute.

The presentation series will run from Tuesday through Friday from 3:10 PM to 4:05 PM in the Hinckley Center Assembly Hall. In Tuesday’s presentation, “Echoes of Truth in Egyptian Devotion,” S. Kent Brown, Andrew C. Skinner, and Peter N. Johnson will discuss preliminary work on a possible documentary on the Book of Abraham and will show illustrations that come from a recent trip to Egypt. Brown is the director of FARMS and the Laura F. Willes Center for Book of Mormon Studies at the Maxwell Institute. Skinner is a professor of Ancient Scripture and, until recently, was the executive director of the Maxwell Institute. Johnson is a writer, director, and producer and directed the *Journey of Faith* and *Journey of Faith: The New World* documentaries, as well as other award-winning films.

On Wednesday, August 20, John Gee and Brian M. Hauglid will present a lecture entitled “Approaching the Book of Abraham.” Gee is the William “Bill” Gay associate research professor of Egyptology at the Maxwell Institute. Hauglid is an associate professor of Ancient Scripture at BYU and editor of the Maxwell Institute’s forthcoming new journal, *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* (a full story on this journal will appear in volume 28, issue 4 later this year).

Kristian Heal, the director of the Center for the Preservation of Ancient Religious Texts at the Maxwell Institute, will discuss “Christianity in Iraq and the Middle East” on Thursday, August 21.

Concluding the series on Friday, August 22, Larry E. Morris will present a lecture entitled “Witnesses of the Book of Mormon.” Morris is a writer and senior editor with the Maxwell Institute.

In addition to the series of presentations about the work of the Maxwell Institute, some of the scholars associated with the Institute will give presentations on other topics.

Daniel C. Peterson, the editor in chief of the Middle Eastern Texts Initiative at the Maxwell Institute, will give a series of lectures about Islam entitled “The Continuing Presence of the Past.” These presentations, which will be held Wednesday through Friday from 11:10 AM to 12:05 PM in the Marriott Center, will focus on the teachings of Islam, the different groups, and the effect Islam is having on world affairs. Peterson will also give a presentation on Monday, August 18, entitled “Eyewitnesses and Ancient Parallels: The Revelations of Joseph Smith” at 12:30 PM in W-111 Benson Building.

Andrew Skinner, in addition to his presentation for the Institute, will present a lecture entitled “Scriptural, Historical, and Legal Evidence of the Events Surrounding the Crucifixion of Christ” on Monday, August 18, at 3:10 PM to 4:05 PM in W-111 Benson Building.

All of these presentations are open to Education Week attendees. For more information about Brigham Young University Campus Education Week, see [educationweek.byu.edu](http://educationweek.byu.edu).

### Announcement to Our Subscribers

Enclosed with this newsletter, you will find *The Book of Mormon and DNA Research*, the first volume in the new series, The Best of the Maxwell Institute. The nature and the editorship of the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* is changing, and in order to give the new editors time to prepare their first issue, we are giving this new book to our subscribers to complement the forthcoming combined issue of the new *Journal*, volume 17, issues 1–2.

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## Book of Mormon Swords in Mesoamerican Antiquity

Swords are an important weapon in the Book of Mormon narrative. The prophet Ether reported that in the final battle of the Jaredites, King Coriantumr, with his sword, “smote off the head” of his relentless enemy Shiz (Ether 15:30). Swords were also used by the earliest Nephites (2 Nephi 5:14) and were among the deadly weapons with which that people were finally “hewn down” at Cumorah by their enemies (Mormon 6:9–10). While the text suggests that some Jaredites and early Nephites may have had metal weaponry (1 Nephi 4:9; 2 Nephi 5:14; Mosiah 8:10–11; Ether 7:9), references to metal weapons, including metal swords, are rare. The Bible describes the Philistine champion Goliath as having a helmet of *nochesheth*, or bronze (“brass” 1 Samuel 17:5 KJV). However, as an authority on ancient warfare observes, “the fact that on occasion the Biblical writer deems it necessary to add the word ‘bronze’ to the use of the term ‘helmet’ would suggest that the headgear was not normally made of metal.”<sup>1</sup> Similarly, in the Book of Mormon most weapons may not have been made of metal. In recent years Latter-day Saint researchers have suggested that most Book of Mormon swords likely resembled the Mesoamerican weapon called a *macana* or *machuahuitl*, a long flat piece of hard wood into which was set a row of sharp obsidian blades on both sides.<sup>2</sup> Unlike war clubs the *machuahuitl* was a slashing weapon and was called a “sword” by the Spaniards who encountered its lethality firsthand.<sup>3</sup> Post-Columbian Mesoamerican art highlights its deadly nature. The Codex Fernandez Leal, for example, portrays a battle between Cuicatec armies of Central Mexico wielding *macanas* with which several warriors are shown decapitated.<sup>4</sup>


In his work on ancient Mesoamerican warfare, military historian Ross Hassig suggests that the *machuahuitl*, which he terms a “broadsword,” was a late Mesoamerican innovation that appeared only after the 13th century.<sup>5</sup> Some critics have questioned whether such a weapon was present in Book of Mormon times, asserting that earlier versions of the weapon were simply barbed clubs.<sup>6</sup> While it is possible that some Mesoamerican weapons labeled *macanas* by scholars were clubs, there are valid reasons to question the claim that the sword



Mesoamerican swords were quite deadly, as evidenced by the decapitation of several warriors as depicted in the Codex Fernandez Leal. Courtesy of The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

*macanas* were only a late Mesoamerican invention. The weapon, for example, held in the right hand of the warrior at Loltun Cave, which some label a war club, is similar to later representations of the Aztec broadsword and likely represents the same weapon.<sup>7</sup> (The Loltun representation probably dates around the time of Christ). Other evidence now available from Mesoamerican art confirms this view.

At the site of La Nueva, near the Pacific coast in southern Guatemala, archaeologists recently discovered a monument in the Cotzumalguapa style dating to the Middle to Late Classic period (AD 450–900). Stela 1 (Monument 11) portrays a ruler who stands, wielding in his right hand a long triangular object pointed downward; this appears to be a sword.<sup>8</sup> A Classic period figurine from Palenque, Mexico, shows a warrior bearing a *macuahuitl*.<sup>9</sup> Mesoamerican scholars working at the site of Teotihuacan in Zone 11 (known as El Gran Conjunto) believe they have identified several weapons on the damaged murals at that site. Mural 1 in Portico 3 shows two weapons with sharp saw-like edges of triangular blades, leading Ruben Cabrera to conclude that “these figures represent two *macanas* or military weapons.”<sup>10</sup> Recently another specialist agreed that the objects represented “weapons that have cutting blades of wooden swords similar to the *machuahuitl*,” something that should not really be surprising since the Teotihuacanos were experts in the use of obsidian.<sup>11</sup> These examples obviously sug-

gest a much earlier use for the weapon than many have assumed. More significantly, however, archaeologist Ann Cyphers, an authority on the Olmec Preclassic site of San Lorenzo (1500–900 BC), has recently identified weapons on recovered monuments at that site, including several curved scimitar-like weapons similar to the Toltec “short sword.” One of these, on Monument 78, which she identifies as a *macana*, has a handle with a straight base inset with triangular blades on both edges. Cyphers notes that while it differs from weapons shown in Middle Preclassic monuments, “its form is like that from later times particularly the Mexica [Aztec] culture.”<sup>12</sup> This suggests that the Aztec *macuahuitl* sword, like the scimitar or short sword, in fact, goes back to Early Preclassic times among the Olmec. Since most contemporary researchers on the Book of Mormon associate the Jaredites with the Olmec tradition, the representation of swords in the earliest Olmec art at San Lorenzo, though contrary to the current views of some scholars, is consistent with Book of Mormon references to swords among the Jaredites. 

by Matthew Roper

resident scholar, Maxwell Institute

#### Notes

1. T. R. Hobbs, *A Time for War: A Study of Warfare in the Old Testament* (Wilmington, DE: Glazier, 1989), 130.
2. John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1985), 262–63; William J. Hamblin and A. Brent Merrill, “Swords in the Book of Mormon,” in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 338–47; Matthew Roper, “Swords and ‘Cimeters’ in the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8/1 (1999): 34–43. Although the terms are frequently

used interchangeably, those unfamiliar with the variety of Mesoamerican weaponry may not always distinguish between *macanas*, which are clubs and swords.

3. Matthew Roper, “Eyewitness Descriptions of Mesoamerican Swords,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5/1 (1996): 150–58.
4. Sebastián van Doesburg, ed., *Códices Cuicatecos: Porfirio Díaz y Fernández Leal* (Mexico: 2001), 203, lamina 16.
5. Ross Hassig, *War and Society in Ancient Mesoamerica* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 138.
6. Brent Lee Metcalfe, “Apologetic and Critical Assumptions about Book of Mormon Historicity,” *Dialogue* 26/3 (1993): 161 n. 27; Deanne G. Matheny, “Does the Shoe Fit? A Critique of the Limited Tehuantepec Geography,” in *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology*, ed. Brent Lee Metcalfe (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993), 294–96; James White, “Of Cities and Swords: The Impossible Task of Mormon Apologetics,” *Christian Research Journal* (Summer 1996): 35.
7. Compare the Preclassic Maya weapon at Loltun Cave in Hamblin and Merrill, “Swords in the Book of Mormon,” 339, with the sword held by the Aztec lord in Ross Hassig, *Aztec Warfare: Imperial Expansion and Political Control* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), 84 fig. 11.
8. Francisco Estrada Belli and Laura J. Kosakowsky, “Survey in Jutiapa, Southeastern Pacific Guatemala, 1997,” *Mexicon* 20/3 (1998): 56 fig. 4.
9. Robert L. Rands and Barbara C. Rands, “Pottery Figurines of the Maya Lowlands,” in *Archaeology of Southern Mesoamerica* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1965), 543–44, 548 fig. 33.
10. Ruben Cabrera, “Conjunto Plaza Oeste,” in *La Pintura Mural Prehispánica en México I: Teotihuacan: Tomo I Catalogo*, ed. Beatriz de la Fuente (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, 1995), 51, my translation.
11. Alfonso A. Garduno Arzave, “De las armas ofensivas en el arte y la arqueología de Teotihuacan,” *La Pintura Mural Prehispánica en México* 12/24–25 (2006): 59–60.
12. Ann Cyphers, *Escultura Olmeca de San Lorenzo Tenochtitlán* (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Antropológicas, 2004), 145–46, my translation.



### From Elder Neal A. Maxwell

The sophist, who is often a carrier of cleverness, is really an intellectual guerrilla, a forlorn man without a country who draws his delight and satisfaction from the process of verbal combat and encounter itself; he does not seek resolution, but disruption. He has no homeland and, therefore, seeks always to fight his battles on the home-

front of the believer. The sophist has nothing to defend. He takes no real risks because he believes in nothing. Perhaps, in a strange and twisted way, he wants to create anomy and drift by using the sword of speciousness to cut other men away from the eternal things that anchor them. (*A Time to Choose* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1972], 31, as quoted in *The Neal A. Maxwell Quote Book*, ed. Cory H. Maxwell [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1997], 323.)

## FARMS Review Stresses Biblical Studies, Remembrance, and Church History

Issue 19/2 of the *FARMS Review*, which is now available, follows a long tradition of dealing with a wide variety of fascinating topics. Of particular interest in this issue is a series of articles on preserving and enlarging the memory of the Saints. As Louis Midgley notes in his introduction to this section, “In the April 2007 General Conference, Elder Marlin K. Jensen of the Seventy delivered a powerful sermon entitled ‘Remember and Perish Not,’ in which he urged the Saints to pay close attention to the ways of remembrance in our scriptures” (p. 23). At the next conference, President Henry B. Eyring took up a similar theme when he gave an address entitled “O Remember, Remember.”

Complementing these conference talks, this number of the *Review* brings together four essays on the ways of remembrance: “The Theology of Memory: Mormon Historical Consciousness,” by Steven L. Olsen; “Remembrance and the Past,” by Gary Novak and Louis Midgley; “Acquiring and Preserving Written Records: A Sacred Commission,” by John Murphy; and “Remembrance,” by James E. Faulconer.

“It is not surprising,” writes Olsen, “that the memory of spiritual experiences is complex, elusive, even ineffable. Nevertheless, for the Latter-day Saints, the spiritual experiences that define their individual and collective lives are hardly ever exclusively intrapersonal. Hence, church members are counseled to share them with one another, where appropriate, in oral and written forms—in testimony meetings, in gospel discussions, in journals, and in family histories” (p. 34). Faulconer adds that “it is important to learn to see the spiritual in the mundane, to find spirituality even when not emotionally wrought, to recognize that the Spirit usually brings peace (John 14:27) and speaks quietly. . . . Most Saints have experienced moments of spirituality to which their souls are anchored. Those who have not will—sometimes in answer to prayer, sometimes unbidden. My prayer is that, when we face doubt or difficulty, we will re-collect our souls by recollecting those anchoring experiences” (pp. 83, 87).

In the area of biblical studies, articles in this issue of the *Review* cover everything from baptism for the dead to the apocrypha. In his review of *Baptism on Account of the Dead (1 Cor 15:29): An Act of Faith in the Resurrection*, John A. Tvedtnes notes that the author, Michael F. Hull, rejects the notion that at least some early Christians in Corinth performed proxy baptisms for the dead, even though many scholars acknowledge the practice. Hull goes on to argue that “any reading of [1 Corinthians 15:29] in terms of vicarious baptism is bound to evoke serious challenges” (p. 216). Tvedtnes counters that Hull has rejected the “plain sense of the verse” (p. 217). He then comments in detail on Hull’s analysis, pointing out that, although the latter makes no attempt to fully engage the Latter-day Saint practice of baptism for the dead, he nevertheless “provides an accurate explanation of the Mormon rationale for the practice” (p. 235). Tvedtnes concludes that Hull’s book and others like it “demonstrate the necessity of living prophets and additional scripture” (p. 237).

Kevin L. Barney, who reviews three different books on the New Testament in this issue, saves his highest praise for *Jesus Christ and the World of the New Testament: An Illustrated Reference for Latter-day Saints*, by Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, Eric D. Huntsman, and Thomas A. Wayment. “At last,” rejoices Barney, “we have a one-volume general introduction to the study of the New Testament that is geared to Latter-day Saint students of scripture—a resource of high quality and impeccable scholarship that an average Saint might crack open and actually *read*. This is no small accomplishment. *World* fills a need that I have long felt existed, and I despaired that such a book would ever actually appear” (pp. 193–94).


Thomas Wayment, one of the authors of *Jesus Christ and the World of the New Testament*, is also a contributor to this issue of the *Review*, offering an essay on *The Pre-Nicene Testament: Fifty-four Formative Texts*, by Robert M. Price. “The entire volume contains virtually no citations to the vast body of secondary literature on the texts in question, but only textual notations concerning variant readings and random musings,” writes Wayment, “which begs the question of what purpose this volume is intended to achieve” (p. 209).

Tackling three of the more controversial topics in church history, John Gee, Allen L. Wyatt, and Craig L. Foster take on the Joseph Smith Papyri, plural marriage, and the Mountain Meadows Massacre, respectively. “Most of what we Egyptologists think we know about the Joseph Smith Papyri is demonstrably wrong,” announces Gee, “whether on the details of their history or on Mormon attitudes about them” (p. 259). Gee therefore suggests a few words of advice for those interested in working with the misunderstood papyri. “I do not think it is a good idea to attempt to hide one’s stance in areas of scholarly inquiry,” he continues, “because understanding the assumptions, presuppositions, and preunderstandings that lie behind one’s presentation of matters is crucial to understanding the arguments” (p. 246).

In his review of *Doing the Works of Abraham: Mormon Polygamy, Its Origin, Practice, and Demise*, by B. Carmon Hardy, Wyatt comments that “it seems unfortunate that Hardy chooses, in his

words, to present, explore, and suggest information valuable to critics without presenting, exploring, or suggesting why those critics’ most long-held condemnations don’t seem reasonable when compared to the actual record” (p. 135).

Foster, in his exhaustive review of the movie *September Dawn* (and a book by the same name), makes his point quite succinctly: The producer and screenwriter of the film “set out to make a controversial movie attacking the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and used the Mountain Meadows Massacre as a backdrop. Unfortunately, contrary to their noble statements about honoring the victims of the massacre, the members of the fateful wagon train were nothing more than mere stage props and pawns in this poorly executed anti-Mormon melodrama” (p. 176).

To purchase this issue of the *FARMS Review*, or to view it online, visit the Maxwell Institute Web site at [maxwellinstitute.byu.edu](http://maxwellinstitute.byu.edu). 


## New Director Appointed for the Maxwell Institute

In June Brigham Young University announced the appointment of M. Gerald Bradford as the new executive director of the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship. Bradford, previously associate executive director of the Maxwell Institute, replaces Andrew C. Skinner, who has accepted an assignment at the Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies and is returning to teaching and research.

“We express deep appreciation to Andrew Skinner for his service as Executive Director of the Maxwell Institute for the past three years. Jerry Bradford’s experience as an administrator and researcher have prepared him well to assume this role,” said BYU Academic Vice President John S. Tanner. “We’re confident that he will continue to inspire his colleagues to preserve and study critical texts and promote faithful Latter-day Saint scholarship of the highest order.”

Bradford joined FARMS in 1995 as director of research. Prior to that appointment, he was executive director of the Western Center of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences,

with offices on the campus of the University of California, Irvine. He also has taught courses in religious education and philosophy at BYU and religious studies courses at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

Bradford earned his PhD in religious studies from the University of California, Santa Barbara. He has a master’s degree in business administration and finance from San Francisco State University. He received his bachelor’s degree from the University of Utah. 

## Willes Center Awards Research Grants

The Laura F. Willes Center for Book of Mormon Studies announces five faculty research grants for the 2008–2009 academic year:

Susan Easton Black and Andrew C. Skinner, “The Phrase ‘This Land’: Doctrinal and Geographical Implications for Latter-day Saints” (a book-length study).

S. Kent Brown, “Messiah: Behold the Lamb of God” (a seven-part documentary film on the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, including his New World ministry).

Keith A. Crandall, “DNA and the Book of Mormon: Exploring Population Genetic Models” (a scientific article).


Alan K. Parrish, “A History of the Interest of Prominent Church Leaders and Scholars in Book of Mormon Geography and Archaeology” (a series of nine studies).

John W. Welch, “The Speeches of Alma” (a book-length study).

The Willes Center awards research grants to full-time faculty members to encourage important research on the Book of Mormon. Though the current awards will support research mainly on the BYU campus, an awardee can pursue research from any locale as long as the topic relates to the Book of Mormon.

One important stipulation requires that, within three months of completing the term of their award, those receiving scholarships are to submit a publishable paper on their research that can potentially appear in the *Journal of Book of Mormon and Restoration Scripture* or other relevant publications. This requirement applies also to those who receive an award for pursuing a media production such as a documentary film.

For long-term projects, awardees may apply for funds for a second year to complete their projects, although their applications will be competing with others for awards. Second-year applications are to include a one-page research report on the first year’s work.

Application forms are available at [willescenter.byu.edu](http://willescenter.byu.edu). The applications for 2009–2010 will be due on September 30, 2008. 

### From Other Publishers

*Defending the Faith* by Daniel C. Peterson (Covenant). For better or worse, hardly a week goes by without the Church being mentioned in the news. Along with this increased level of visibility comes an increase in the amount of criticism directed toward the Church. In this two-CD set of engaging fireside talks, gospel scholar Daniel C. Peterson addresses some of the most common criticisms and helps members know best how to respond to each. Some of the issues he discusses include: the DNA question, the nature of the Godhead, deification, so-called “errors” in the Book of Mormon, Book of Mormon geography, the claim that Latter-day Saints aren’t Christians, and works vs. grace.

## INSIGHTS

Paula W. Hicken, Jacob D. Rawlins, *Editors*

A Publication of

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NEAL A. MAXWELL INSTITUTE  
FOR RELIGIOUS SCHOLARSHIP  
M. Gerald Bradford, *Executive Director*

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The Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship encourages and supports research on the Book of Mormon, the Book of Abraham, the Bible, other ancient scripture, and related subjects. The Maxwell Institute publishes and distributes titles in these areas for the benefit of scholars and interested Latter-day Saint readers.

Primary research interests at the Maxwell Institute include the history, language, literature, culture, geography, politics, and law relevant to ancient scripture. Although such subjects are of secondary importance when compared with the spiritual and eternal messages of scripture, solid research and academic perspectives can supply certain kinds of useful information, even if only tentatively, concerning many significant and interesting questions about scripture.

The Maxwell Institute makes reports about this research available widely, promptly, and economically. These publications are peer-reviewed to ensure that scholarly standards are met. The proceeds from the sale of these materials are used to support further research and publications.

