



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

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## BYU Unveils Exhibition of Two Ancient Roman Bronze Plates

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# Insights

A WINDOW ON THE ANCIENT WORLD VOLUME 27 | 2007

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<http://maxwellinstitute.byu.edu>

## BYU Unveils Exhibition of Two Ancient Roman Bronze Plates

Now showing at BYU's Harold B. Lee Library is an exhibit titled "Two Ancient Roman Plates: Bronze Military Diplomas and Other Sealed Documents." The set of well-preserved artifacts was given to BYU by donors assembled by John W. Welch, editor in chief of *BYU Studies*, who has served, along with BYU classics professor John F. Hall, as curator of the exhibit.

The plates granted citizenship and military honors to a retiring Roman soldier in the province of Dacia (modern-day Romania and parts of Bulgaria) in AD 109. The legal effect of the plates gave evidence of the soldier's honorable discharge and allowed him to move freely throughout the empire, as well as to wear the toga and be exempt from taxes as a Roman citizen.

"These plates have a natural place in the library because they are a historical record of ancient writing and record keeping," said Shaun McMurdie, the Lee Library's chair of exhibition services and art director for the exhibit. "It's not every day you are able to see up close such a remarkable set of metal plates from 2,000 years ago."

The new exhibit, near the library's main entrance, is laid out to tell the story of these plates and their significance as fine examples of ancient writing on metal plates. Welch sees this imperial artifact as illuminating important ancient documentary practices: "All people are amazed and fascinated to see how the Romans ingeniously designed such plates, which feature an open presentation of the text and also an interior sealed portion," he said. "In the exhibit, we refer to such records as doubled, sealed, witnessed documents."

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THE NEAL A. MAXWELL INSTITUTE  
FOR RELIGIOUS SCHOLARSHIP  
Inaugural Annual Lecture



President Cecil O. Samuelson  
of Brigham Young University

Friday, March 23, 2007

Lecture 7:00 PM

Reception 8:00 PM

Joseph Smith Building Auditorium  
Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah




THE  
NEAL A. MAXWELL INSTITUTE  
FOR RELIGIOUS SCHOLARSHIP

## Roman Plates cont. from page 1

A replica of the plates will be on hand for visitors to handle, and video presentations answer 10 questions about the plates and their ancient use.

“The video portion of the exhibit acts as a great form of supplemental material to give visitors a little more immersion into the culture and story behind the plates,” said Michael Gee, director of multimedia projects for the library. “Through video clips, the plates can be understood and enjoyed by any age group.”

Two articles recently published in *BYU Studies* (vol. 45, no. 2, 2006) describe this particular pair of plates in detail and explain the interest in the university’s acquisition of one of the finest examples of ancient writing on metal. This issue can be obtained online at [byustudies.byu.edu](http://byustudies.byu.edu) or at the Lee Library’s Special Collections circulation desk.

To learn more about the “Two Ancient Roman Plates” exhibition, contact the library or visit online at [www.library.byu.edu](http://www.library.byu.edu). 

### PUBLICATIONS

***Popol Vuh CD-ROM: Sacred Book of the Ancient Maya Electronic Database***, edited and translated by Allen J. Christenson and published by the Maxwell Institute’s Center for the Preservation of Ancient Religious Texts, features versions of the Popol Vuh in English, Spanish, and K’iche’ Maya. The fully searchable database includes hundreds of high-quality images of the manuscript, maps, plants and animals, and Maya art and architecture. An introduction and copious footnotes illuminate the historical and cultural context. Also included is an audio file of the text in K’iche’ Maya.

***St. Ephrem the Syrian: Select Poems***, edited, introduced, annotated, and rendered into English by Sebastian Brock and George Kiraz (Syriac Institute), is the newest volume from the Maxwell Institute’s Middle Eastern Texts Initiative. It features original texts and, on facing pages, lucid translations of 20 substantial poems from the fourth century. Written by the most important theologian of the Syriac Christian tradition, they reflect upon the history of salvation, commencing with paradise and continuing through the earthly life of Christ and the rise of the Christian church.

# Insights

A Window on the Ancient World  
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A Publication of the  
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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.

### For more information

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