



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

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## Full Issue

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# Insights

A WINDOW ON THE ANCIENT WORLD VOLUME 27 | 2007

Number 1

<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."

[continued on page 6](#)

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

## Repetitive Resumption in the Book of Mormon


One of the most important contributions of biblical scholarship since the time of Joseph Smith has been the recognition and analysis of editorial activity in the Old Testament. Like the Hebrew Bible, the Book of Mormon is a compilation of several literary sources produced under the auspices of ancient editors or redactors. Significantly, one of the primary signs of editorial activity in the Old Testament, a technique known as repetitive resumption, is also attested in the Book of Mormon.

Repetitive resumption refers to an editor's return to an original narrative following a deliberate interlude. Old Testament writers accomplished this by repeating a key word or phrase that immediately preceded the textual interruption. For example, in Joshua 1:7, Moses's successor counsels ancient Israel to be "strong and very courageous." This admonition is then followed by a mandate to continually meditate upon the "book of the law" (v. 8). Since a reference to the "book of the law" alters the focus of Joshua's primarily militaristic account, most biblical scholars conclude that Joshua 1:8 represents a later editorial insertion that successfully transformed the book of Joshua into "Torah" literature.<sup>1</sup> Directly following this interruption, the Hebrew redactor returns to the original narrative by restating the key words that immediately precede his insertion: "Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage" (v. 9). Similar examples of this phenomenon have been identified throughout the Hebrew Bible.

A careful survey of editorial activity in the Book of Mormon shows that Nephite editors used repetitive resumption in a similar manner. For example, the editor of the book of Alma (in this case apparently Mormon) interrupts the account of Alma's confrontation with Zeezrom by interjecting an outline of the Nephite monetary system (see Alma 11:1–19). Prior to this insertion, the account reads, "Now the object of these lawyers was to get gain; and they got gain according to their employ" (10:32). However, after the editorial interruption that breaks the flow of the primary narrative, the

editor returns to the original account by using repetitive resumption: "Now, it was for the sole purpose to get gain, because they received their wages according to their employ" (11:20).

Another example of repetitive resumption in the Book of Mormon occurs in Helaman 5:5–14. In this section the compiler inserts a direct report of Helaman's powerful discourse to his sons Nephi and Lehi (see vv. 6–12). This insertion is intentionally prefaced by the editorial introduction, "For they remembered the words which their father Helaman spake unto them" (v. 5). The compiler's choice of words in this passage proves especially significant. The word *remember* serves as the *Leitwort* (key word) recurring throughout Helaman's discourse.<sup>2</sup> In these few short verses, Helaman intentionally emphasizes the word *remember* by repeating it a total of 12 times. With great editorial skill, therefore, the compiler of this account used repetitive resumption to bracket Helaman's discourse with a return to the original introduction, "And they did remember his words" (v. 14).

Further study of repetitive resumption in the Book of Mormon may help shed additional light on the editorial activity that underlies the text. This literary technique is significant not only because it supports the authenticity of the Book of Mormon (the technique had not yet been identified by biblical scholars in 1830) but also because it allows readers to identify the primary message that the original writers of the Book of Mormon wanted their audience to receive. 

### By David E. Bokovoy

PhD candidate, Hebrew Bible, Brandeis University,  
CES instructor

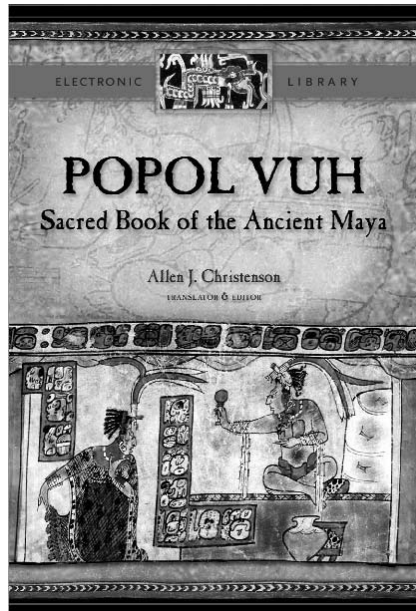
#### Notes

1. See Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 384, 388.
2. "A *Leitwort* is a word or a word-root that recurs significantly in a text, in a continuum of texts, or in a configuration of texts: by following these repetitions, one is able to decipher or grasp a meaning of the text, or at any rate, the meaning will be revealed more strikingly" (Martin Buber, as cited in Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* [New York: BasicBooks, 1981], 93).

## Maya Origin Story Now on Searchable CD-ROM

The Popol Vuh, an epic poem that tells the creation story of the Maya, will soon be available in a searchable database published on CD-ROM by the Maxwell Institute's Center for the Preservation of Ancient Religious Texts (CPART). Prepared by Allen J. Christenson, the database incorporates his recently published edition and translation of the Popol Vuh. The database offers the first-ever publication of a complete set of images of the earliest manuscript of the Popol Vuh, kindly provided by the Newberry Library in Chicago.

Fully searchable, the *Popol Vuh CD-ROM: Sacred Book of the Ancient Maya Electronic Database* links the text to related images of plants, animals, Maya art and architecture, and maps. It also includes a high-resolution scan of the Newberry Library's entire Popol Vuh manuscript. Christenson provides a literal English translation and a free, or nonliteral, English translation that better communicates the flow of the narrative. It also includes a Spanish translation and two K'iche'-Maya versions, one in the older romanized K'iche' script and the other in modernized K'iche'. An audio file allows users to listen to the Popol Vuh in the K'iche'-Maya language out loud. The introduction



and copious footnotes provide historical and cultural context for the Maya culture and the Popol Vuh text itself. The University of Texas Press will distribute the *Popol Vuh CD-ROM* beginning in March 2007.

Christenson, an associate professor of humanities, classics, and comparative literature at BYU, has designed this CD-ROM for scholars as well as for anyone interested in Maya culture or world literature. But he particularly prepared it with the K'iche'-Maya people of Guatemala in mind. Though the Popol Vuh was composed by members of the Maya nobility soon after the Spanish Conquest in the early 16th century, it is based entirely on records dating to pre-Columbian times. Unfortunately, most modern K'iche' Indians have not had the opportunity to read their culture's most important ancient document. Expressing enthusiasm for the project, Guatemalan officials and educators have requested multiple copies.

With its fully searchable electronic format, hundreds of linked images and explanatory footnotes, and Christenson's up-to-date translations, the *Popol Vuh CD-ROM* promises to aid both scholars of Maya studies and the people of Guatemala in understanding the mythic origins of the Maya people. ■

## Mary and Elisabeth Topic of Museum of Art Lecture

As part of the ongoing Museum of Art lecture series on the life of Christ, S. Kent Brown, director of FARMS, addressed the topic "The Birth of the Savior" on January 17. Drawing from Luke 1 and 2 and studies on life among ancient Jews, he focused on Mary and Elisabeth, whose lives are only faintly sketched in the scriptures.

Emphasizing the importance of foreordination, Brown began by reviewing scriptural prophecies about Mary. He noted that Book of Mormon prophecy offers more details about her than Bible prophecy does, such as her hometown and even her name. Although Elisabeth appears more indirectly in scriptural prophecy, her positive influence on her son is discernible in the prophecies about John the Baptist. For example,

[continued on page 5](#)

## ***FARMS Review* Takes Up Doctrinal Issues, Restoration Accounts, Science vs. Religion**

As editor of the *FARMS Review*, Daniel C. Peterson is well acquainted with critics' opinions about it, FARMS in general, and, by extension, the Maxwell Institute. In his introduction to the latest *FARMS Review* (vol. 18, no. 2, 2006), Peterson responds to the critics by exploring the meaning of the term *apologetics* ("arguing . . . for or against any position") and demonstrating at length how the term applies to the Maxwell Institute and its publications. He cautions that the term is relevant only to a portion of the Maxwell Institute's work. "The garden of faith, like most gardens, requires both weeding and watering," Peterson writes. "While the *FARMS Review* does most of the weeding for the organization, FARMS as a whole expends considerably more effort on nourishing." He goes on to candidly address 11 recurring questions centering on the editorial philosophy of the *FARMS Review*, its peer-review process, and the academic merit of its content.

David L. Paulsen and Cory G. Walker evaluate Douglas J. Davies's *The Mormon Culture of Salvation: Force, Grace and Glory*. They note that while this book (written by a highly qualified non-Mormon scholar with special interest in the academic study of Mormonism) provides a "deeper understanding of the Mormon culture of salvation" and "makes a substantial contribution to Mormon studies," it falls short on three significant topics: the relationships of temple work to worship, of grace to works, and of Christ's suffering both in Gethsemane and on Calvary to the atonement.

For example, as a corrective to Davies's view that Latter-day Saint "temple work" values work over worship, the reviewers draw on the Bible and the Book of Mormon to show that work can be a form of worship and that selfless service in the temple on behalf of the dead is "worship of the highest order." They go on to clarify the roles of grace and works in salvation and to refute the idea that Mormon emphasis on Christ's suffering in Gethsemane (accurately characterized as Christ's

proactive role in redeeming mankind) eclipses the importance of his death on the cross (his passive role, according to Davies). "Gethsemane and the cross are both necessary phases of the process of atonement," the reviewers emphasize.

Although Davies's analysis is shown to be at odds with Latter-day Saint self-understanding on certain points of belief and practice, it is generally "marked with clarity and insight." Paulsen and Walker "look forward to future works penned by Davies and the spur they will provide to clarify and deepen our own understanding of our faith."

The *FARMS Review* also includes Kevin L. Barney's appraisal of *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820–1844*, edited by John W. Welch and Erick B. Carlson. The volume compiles dozens of primary documents relating to the First Vision, the Book of Mormon translation, the restoration of the priesthood and of temple keys, succession in the presidency, and other foundational events of the Restoration, with each genre introduced by an interpretive essay. "These are not matters of minor historical detail," writes Barney. "They go rather to the very heart of the truth claims made by the Church and therefore to its reason for being."


Barney views such comprehensive collections as a boon to researchers who wish to undertake a detailed examination of primary sources in order to reach conclusions of their own. He notes that several of the genres were pioneered by *BYU Studies* but have been updated and expanded in ways that mark the bulk of the collection "either new or essentially new." Dean C. Jessee's chapter on the earliest documented accounts of the First Vision is a prime example. An expansion of Jessee's seminal 1969 article, it adds subsequently discovered documents that make that section "the most complete resource for the early First Vision account." Barney notes many other highlights and concludes, "Everyone with an interest in the origins of Mormonism, whether as a matter of faith or simply as an academic interest, should read this book."

Another essay in the *FARMS Review* is "Orders of Submission," Louis Midgley's take on the Southern Baptist Convention's attitude toward Mormons. Having examined the 2005 issue of the *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*,

which was devoted to articles on Mormons and their beliefs, Midgley concludes that since the SBC event in Salt Lake City in 1998, Southern Baptist leaders have only slightly moderated their anti-Mormon views. Analyzing the 1998 convention itself, Midgley describes some of the vicious anti-Mormon literature prepared especially for the event. He compares the Southern Baptist leaders' statements during the convention with the articles in the 2005 *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* and observes that although some countercultist publishers have been marginalized in the Protestant community, Baptist leadership continues to encourage the promulgation of falsehoods about Latter-day Saint beliefs. And worse, they do it under the guise of love. Daniel C. Peterson notes in his introduction that Midgley's conclusions "raise questions about the efficacy of continued conversations with those whose primary interest is in securing the submission of the Saints."

Also in this number of the *FARMS Review*, Egyptologist Kerry Muhlestein sizes up *Astronomy, Papyrus, and Covenant*, a 2005 FARMS publication edited by John Gee and Brian M.

Hauglid. In addition, physical chemist Robert R. Bennett and philosopher Richard Sherlock, in separate essays, ably grapple with imagined tensions and incompatibilities between Mormonism and science. In responding to the hasty conclusions drawn by one disaffected Latter-day Saint, Bennett offers reasoned, faithful perspectives on why it is folly "to presume to limit God by virtue of man's current understanding of the physical universe." In similar fashion, Sherlock enters the controversy of intelligent design—the idea that the complexities of living beings point to an intelligent creator and cannot be explained solely on the basis of randomness and natural selection. He explains pertinent terms and concepts, addresses the charge that the theory shortcuts science, and lays out a case for why Latter-day Saints and serious Christians "generally should be sympathetic to and supportive of intelligent design" and accepting of "God's intervention in nature."

To view the *FARMS Review* online or to purchase a copy, please visit the Maxwell Institute Web site ([maxwellinstitute.byu.edu](http://maxwellinstitute.byu.edu)). 

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## MOA Lecture cont. from page 3

that her son was filled with the Holy Ghost from birth implies that Elisabeth was a person of holy ways and habits, Brown said.

Brown then sketched what family life in rural Nazareth may have been like, and he described Jewish traditions of betrothal and marriage that probably affected Mary, Joseph, and Elisabeth. Though from different tribes, Elisabeth (of Levi) and Mary (of Judah) were emotionally close enough for Mary to journey 100 miles for an extended stay with her cousin. Brown observed that the cousins must have had a common relative who married outside the tribe and that, though rare, such marriages did take place in ancient Israel. Their homes were settings where Mary and Elisabeth underwent some of their most sacred experiences, including John's birth, Elisabeth's prophecy of the Savior,

Zacharias's recovery of his speech, and the angel Gabriel's annunciation to Mary.

According to Brown, Luke 1 and 2 are stories of beginnings: the beginning of fulfilled prayers for Zacharias and Elisabeth, the beginning of Mary's experiences as the mother of the Savior, and the beginning of the miracles that heralded the Messiah's birth. Though little is known of their lives, Mary and Elisabeth influenced not only the spiritual development of their sons but also, through them, the lives of all who would follow Jesus Christ.


The lectures will continue on Wednesday nights through April 11, with most speakers drawn from BYU's Religious Education faculty. Upcoming *Insights* reports will cover the presentations by two Maxwell Institute scholars: John W. Welch ("The Five Faces of the Savior in the Sermon on the Mount," January 17) and Andrew C. Skinner ("Crucifixion and Resurrection," March 21). 

## 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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**Neal A. Maxwell  
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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.

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