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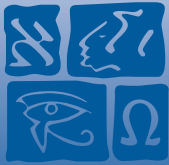
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Insights

A WINDOW ON THE ANCIENT WORLD VOLUME 25 | 2005

Number 2

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Latest Addition to the Collected Works of Hugh Nibley Series

FARMS is pleased to announce the release of a new volume of previously unpublished class lectures by celebrated Latter-day Saint scholar Hugh Nibley, who recently passed away at age 94. *Apostles and Bishops in Early Christianity*, volume 15 in the Collected Works of Hugh Nibley series, comprises Nibley's finely detailed lecture notes for a course he taught at Brigham Young University in 1954 on the office of bishop in the early Christian church.

When the course ended, Nibley moved on to other projects and did not see this research through to publication. Although these lectures are now dated in certain (mostly stylistic) respects, readers will be impressed by his control of primary sources and the sustained depth of his skillful analysis. Nibley fans in particular will welcome this latest addition to the massive library of his collected works and will relish the insights it adds to his related studies on Mormonism and early Christianity. Besides laying out Nibley's case for the early church's loss of prophetic gifts and

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FARMS Review Probes Geography, Papyri, Isaiah, Creation, and More

The latest *FARMS Review* (vol. 16, no. 2, 2004) is another weighty issue flush with articles covering a wide array of interesting topics. In the lineup are reviews of works on Book of Mormon geography, de-Christianization of the Old Testament, the Joseph Smith Papyri, Isaiah's central message, Jerusalem in Lehi's day, creation theology, gospel symbolism, and the Christian countercult movement. Also included are two freestanding essays, one older article of lasting appeal (initiating a new feature in the *Review*), book notes, a 2003 Book of Mormon bibliography, and the editor's top picks of recent publications. A foretaste of the many engaging articles follows.

In the introduction, editor Daniel C. Peterson demonstrates how detractors since 1830 have abandoned one theory after another in seeking to explain away Joseph Smith's role in bringing forth the Book of Mormon. Peterson covers a lot of ground as he sketches a kind of intellectual history of the anti-Mormon campaign. He ably turns each successive theory on its head. Responding to the charge that if the Book of Mormon were truly an

ancient record, that fact should have been proved by now, Peterson writes, "One wonders when, exactly, the deadline for verification passed" and asks, in turn, why critics have not been able to prove the record false, much less agree on how it came to be.

Three reviews deal with Book of Mormon geography. In the first, John E. Clark, professor of anthropology at BYU and director of the BYU New World Archaeological Foundation, weighs the claims of two books. He finds them to be unconvincing, the first "privileg[ing] impression over substance" and the second (a proposal for lower Central America as the range of Nephite and Lamanite lands) "worth contemplating" but faulty on many counts. Clark offers insights into the narrow neck of land, population sizes, Izapa Stela 5 (the so-called Lehi Tree of Life Stone), weights and measures, and Jaredite colonization. In other reviews, Allen J. Christenson and Brant A. Gardner reach similar conclusions regarding attempts to identify Book of Mormon lands through superficial linguistic analysis and to challenge the limited geography model (see below), respectively.

In a freestanding study entitled "Limited Geography and the Book of Mormon: Historical Antecedents and Early Interpretations," FARMS resident

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University of New Hampshire archaeologist who discovered the mural; Michael D. Coe, an anthropologist at Yale University who is a major figure in the decipherment of Maya writing; David S. Stuart, an archaeologist at the University of Texas at Austin who, like Coe, is known for his expertise in Maya writing; Karl A. Taube, an anthropologist at the University of California, Riverside, who serves as the iconographer of the San Bartolo Mural Project; and Heather Hurst, an archaeological illustrator at Yale University who is producing reproductions of the San Bartolo murals.

Among those attending the symposium was Allen J. Christenson, a humanities professor at BYU who specializes in the art and literature of the Maya people of Mexico and Central America. As translator of *Popol Vuh: The Sacred Book of the Maya*, 2 vols. (London: O Books, 2003–4), he

appreciates the cultural significance of the San Bartolo murals.

“If someone sat down to imagine what the find of the century would look like, he could not have done any better than this,” Christenson said, noting that the murals are remarkable for their antiquity, beauty, and intact state as well as for the rich iconographic and epigraphic information they contain. The frescoes include phonetic Maya language (only a few of the glyphs have been translated so far) of purely theological content, and the scenes of creation mythology ending with the accession of a king relate directly to Popol Vuh creation stories. “What we have of the Popol Vuh is a 16th-century copy, but the stories and creation imagery go way back, before the time of Christ,” Christenson said. 📖

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apostolic authority, the book opens a new window on the character of Nibley’s scholarly interests and teaching style during his seventh year of teaching at BYU.

The lectures are divided into two sections. The first section considers the duties and ecclesiastical authority of apostles and bishops throughout the early church, and the second section covers topics related to the legitimacy of the Roman church’s controversial claim to ecclesiastical supremacy. Nibley began his course by summarizing the conflicting views of Protestant and Catholic scholars on whether the early church was formally organized or not (lack of consensus on this issue warranted reexamination of the two main ecclesiastical offices in question: that of apostle and bishop). He then reviewed key differences in those offices and traced the gradual secularization of the bishop’s role into one resembling that of an elected political magistrate, with the trappings of civic prominence and magisterial dignity. Nibley emphasized that no single bishop had primacy over any other and that episcopal councils and synods eventually became the norm for governing the church in the absence of the higher ecclesiastical authority possessed by the apostles.

Nibley also emphasized that early Christian leaders consistently differentiated between episcopal and apostolic authority. This is clearly evident in epistles written to outlying churches in which local bishops such as Ignatius, Clement, and Polycarp, recognizing the limits of their stewardship, urged repentance not as emissaries acting under an apostolic or even episcopal mandate, but merely as concerned friends and observers. Even centuries later, when bishops assumed higher authority, they still did not command repentance. “Plainly the apostles had a kind of authority that none of their successors had,” Nibley wrote. “They were conceived of as the twelve judges of Israel and so were limited to that number” (10).

In the second half of his course, Nibley gave special attention to how the office of bishop changed drastically as Rome emerged as the controversial seat of episcopal and, later, papal authority. He probed the shifts in power, the origin of episcopal hierarchy, issues of apostolic succession, and modern-day confusion surrounding the development of papal power. “A thousand years after Nicaea the church discovered that a one-man organization could not provide a dependable succession and hit upon the idea of a council of men,” taught Nibley. “This is exactly what

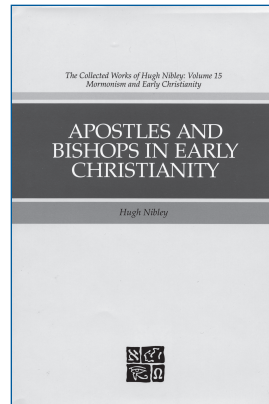
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the primitive church had in the Twelve Apostles, but at that late date the sacred college could not and did not pretend to be apostolic in origin. What better indication that the primitive church had been taken away?” (175).


The typescripts that Nibley wrote before giving these lectures contained some partial references to his sources. With painstaking efforts the editors and Joseph Ponczoch supplied 770 footnotes, which are typeset at the bottom of each page. Greek, Latin, French, and German texts are supplied so that students can compare Nibley’s translations with the originals he consulted. In less than 10 percent of the cases, the source that Nibley had in mind was not found at the time this book went to press. Many of the missing sources, however, have already been located by Douglas Salmon and others.

Because Nibley’s typed lectures also lacked a summation or conclusion, John F. Hall and John W. Welch suggest in their “Editors’ Postscript” that the last words of Nibley’s study “The Passing of the Primitive Church: Forty Variations on an Unpopular Theme” serve as a fitting conclusion for this volume: “We have indicated above some of the



reasons for suggesting that the church, like its founder, his apostles, and the prophets before them, came into the world, did the works of the Father, *and then went out of the world*, albeit with a promise of return. Some aspects of the problem, at least, deserve closer attention than students have hitherto been willing to give them” (reprinted in Nibley, *Mormonism and Early Christianity*, ed. Todd M. Compton and Stephen D. Ricks [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1987], 168–208).

The quality of Nibley’s exposition and its reliance on enduring primary sources add value and luster to the lectures despite their age. In typical fashion, *Apostles and Bishops* “pushe[s] the arguments far beyond the positions that have been staked out by others” and “raise[s] significant questions for future explorations concerning the history of early Christianity,” the editors state in the preface. “Readers will find these lecture notes just as informative and engaging as the popular recordings and published transcripts of Nibley’s later lectures on the Book of Mormon and Pearl of Great Price.”

To purchase a copy of *Apostles and Bishops*, visit the FARMS section (under “BYU Publications”) of byubookstore.com. 

FARMS Review cont. from page 1

scholar Matthew Roper demonstrates that current views favoring a small-scale geography are not of recent devise, as some critics claim, but had antecedents as early as the 1840s. Speculation on the geography question has spawned two principal theories: the hemispheric model (with Book of Mormon lands comprising North, Central, and South America) and the limited geography model (a restricted New World setting on the order of hundreds rather than thousands of miles). Roper notes that although the hemispheric view was popular among early Latter-day Saints, it is not clear whether it was the result of prophetic revelation or the outgrowth of the personal ideas and

assumptions of the Prophet Joseph Smith and others. The striking diversity of 19th-century opinion on Book of Mormon lands attests that the church had no authoritative stance on what was—and continues to be—an open issue. According to Roper, today many serious students of the Book of Mormon favor Mesoamerica (encompassing southern Mexico and Guatemala) as the best match for the complex requirements of the text itself—a view that has remained tenable after years of examination in light of the archaeological and cultural record of ancient Mesoamerica.

“The Book of Abraham: Ask the Right Questions and Keep on Looking” is Larry E. Morris’s review of Robert K. Ritner’s translation of the Hor