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

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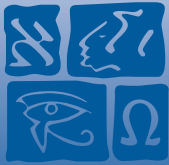
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Insights

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FARMS is pleased to announce the release of a new volume of previously unpublished class lectures by celebrated Latter-day Saint scholar Hugh Nibley, who recently passed away at age 94.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

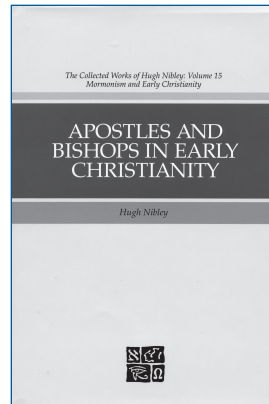
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Hugh Nibley *cont. from page 5*

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

Book of Breathings, part of the Joseph Smith Papyri. Ritner, associate professor of Egyptology at the prestigious Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, annotated his translation extensively and included notes on previous scholars' work, providing helpful information for students of the Joseph Smith Papyri. Interestingly, the same papyri fragments were translated by Michael D. Rhodes in a 2002 FARMS publication entitled *The Hor Book of Breathings: Translation and Commentary*. Rhodes is associate research professor in the Department of Ancient Scripture at BYU. Since Ritner and Rhodes worked independently yet refer to the same body of scholarship, their translations invite comparison. To help facilitate that effort, Morris's review includes a side-by-side comparison of the two translations of the hieroglyphic text accompanying the initial vignette in Joseph Smith Papyri I.

The tone of Ritner's commentary reveals hostility toward the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints despite the assertion of impartiality. Ritner also denigrates Joseph Smith and the contributions of Latter-day Saint scholars Hugh Nibley and John Gee. Morris notes that this kind of nonscholarly ax-

grinding detracts from the value of Ritner's translation, as does his refusal to deal with other scholars' claims that certain nonscriptural elements of the Book of Abraham also appear in ancient or medieval texts that were unavailable to Joseph Smith. As for the quality of Ritner's translation, Morris suggests this is a good topic for trained Egyptologists to take up in the future.

In "Exploring the Isaiah Code: Ascending the Seven Steps on the Stairway to Heaven," David Rolph Seely, professor of ancient scripture at BYU, assesses Avraham Gileadi's latest book and his impressive Isaiah corpus in its entirety. Seely adjudges *Isaiah Decoded: Ascending the Ladder to Heaven* distinctive because of its "holistic approach [that] attempts to read and understand passages in Isaiah in light of their relationship to the writings of Isaiah as a whole." Gileadi employs structural, typological, and rhetorical analyses to relate Isaiah's writings to people today—"a message so relevant to the times in which we live and to our divine destiny as children of God," Gileadi writes in his book. According to Gileadi, each of the seven

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FROM OTHER PUBLISHERS


Dead Sea Scrolls Reader Released

A new multivolume work promises to facilitate study of the Dead Sea Scrolls. *The Dead Sea Scrolls Reader*, published by the prestigious academic publisher E. J. Brill, offers transcriptions and English translations of all the nonbiblical Qumran texts.

An advantage of the *Reader* is that it classifies the texts by genre. This practice was not followed in the official *Discoveries in the Judaean Desert* series, where the texts were originally published, and the resulting dispersion of related texts therein was an obstacle to comparative analysis. In the *Reader*, some 500 Hebrew and Aramaic texts are grouped into six volumes, each covering a genre such as religious law or exegetical, parabiblical, calendrical/sapiential, and poetic/liturgical works. Twenty-five texts are published therein for the first time.


The editors of the project are Donald W. Parry, a professor of Hebrew Bible at BYU, and Emanuel Tov, the J. L. Magnes Professor of Bible at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and editor in chief of the Dead Sea Scrolls publication project. Parry and Tov have worked on the project since the mid-1990s.

The 2,400-page text of the *Reader* is being used in the BYU Dead Sea Scrolls Database on CD-ROM, with planned publication this fall. This electronic database will include the scrolls in a searchable format, together with many additional research tools.

The Dead Sea Scrolls comprise a collection of approximately 900 texts, written in Hebrew and Aramaic, that form a significant body of secular and religious literature. The scrolls have been called the most important archaeological find of this century because of the way in which they have increased knowledge of the Hebrew Bible, the Second Temple era of Judaism (250 BC–AD 70), the Hebrew language, and various religious texts. 

levels on the ascent to heaven represents a set of spiritual characteristics that people must acquire if they are to gain salvation (as opposed to descending the metaphorical ladder to damnation).

Seely notes that Gileadi's model of ascent derives from the "bifid" (parallel) structure of the book of Isaiah—namely, seven parallel themes arranged chiastically in each half of the book. "The idea is that Isaiah arranged his material in such a way that he teaches about salvation and invites God's children to come to salvation through a series of choices between opposites [e.g., ruin/rebirth, rebellion/compliance]," Seely explains. Each level is related to nations or biblical figures that reflect certain spiritual qualities and afford instructive models. Seely finds "many marvelous insights throughout this book"—such as Isaiah's teaching that creation is not a one-time event but a cyclical process that continues throughout the plan of redemption (and Gileadi shows how that process occurs at each of the seven levels). Of *Isaiah Decoded*, Seely concludes, "There is something here for everyone. . . . Gileadi has succeeded in bringing the teachings of Isaiah to the average reader in an interesting and readable format that can aid us in 'likening' these things to ourselves."

To purchase the latest *FARMS Review*, visit the FARMS section (under "BYU Publications") of byubookstore.com. 

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FARMS is part of Brigham Young University's Institute for the Study and Preservation of Ancient Religious Texts. As such, it encourages and supports research on the Book of Mormon, the Book of Abraham, the Bible, other ancient scripture, and related subjects. Under the FARMS imprint, the Institute publishes and distributes titles in these areas for the benefit of scholars and interested Latter-day Saint readers.

Primary research interests at FARMS 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.

FARMS makes interim and final 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. As a service to teachers and students of the scriptures, research results are distributed in both scholarly and popular formats.

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