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Insights

A WINDOW ON THE ANCIENT WORLD VOLUME 25 | 2005

Number 3

<http://farms.byu.edu>

Library of Congress Hosts Academic Conference on Joseph Smith

In recognition of the bicentennial of the Prophet Joseph Smith's birth, the Library of Congress, in Washington DC, hosted an academic conference on 6–7 May 2005 titled "The Worlds of Joseph Smith." Carried internationally via webcast, the event featured 17 scholars (nearly evenly divided between Latter-day Saints and those of other faiths) who examined Joseph Smith's theological contributions and evaluated the claim that the church he founded is on track to becoming a world religion.

"Our hope in this conference is to better understand Joseph's life and mission—to position him, to the degree we can, within the larger framework of American spirituality and world religions," said Robert L. Millet, professor of ancient scripture at Brigham Young University, in introductory remarks.

Lehi's Journey of Faith Topic of FARMS Documentary

FARMS has teamed with award-winning Latter-day Saint filmmaker Peter Johnson to produce a documentary on Lehi and company's route from Jerusalem to the New World.

Based on the most recent research, the 90-minute DVD documentary will feature Latter-day Saint scholars commenting on proposed sites for the party's first base camp near the Red Sea; Nahom, where Ishmael was buried; and Bountiful, the fertile coastal locale where Nephi directed the building of his ship. The documentary will also feature the latest findings on Lehi's ocean voyage and explore candidates for Book of Mormon sites in Mesoamerica.

The following report covers the first three sessions of the conference; a report of the remaining two sessions will appear in a subsequent issue of this newsletter.

Joseph Smith in His Own Time

Richard L. Bushman, an emeritus professor of history at Columbia University, presented the first paper, "Joseph Smith's Many Histories." He noted that "Joseph Smith assumes the character of the history selected for him" and argued that critics have failed to plumb his depths because they shrink his historical context. "Broadening the historical context increases appreciation of the man," he said. Bushman traced the Prophet's struggle for self-understanding and explained that after Joseph Smith translated the Book of Mormon, his earlier marvelous experiences took on clearer meaning and import and his confidence soared as he came to recognize his prophethood.

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"Since I was first introduced to Peter Johnson, I have come to appreciate both his superb abilities and the skills of the filming crew who accompanied us on location in the Middle East," said S. Kent Brown, the director of Ancient Studies at Brigham Young University and the lead historical consultant on the documentary. "In my opinion, this film embodies not only the best of scholarship on the trek of Lehi and Sariah but also the finest in artistic presentation."

Johnson previously worked as an executive producer with the Audiovisual Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and before that as director of the BYU Motion Picture Studio, which under his direction became one of the top-rated university film studios in the world. He

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More on the River Laman

The Book of Mormon records that after Lehi and his family fled Jerusalem at the Lord's command, they camped in a valley by a river (1 Nephi 2:6). Lehi named this river Laman and the valley Lemuel after his eldest sons. Envisioning that locale, many readers of that account naturally may think of the seasonal rivers that run through many of the wadis of the Arabian peninsula.

For more than a century, however, critics have found fault with the description of the river Laman as "continually running" into the Red Sea during the time that Lehi's group camped in the valley of Lemuel (see vv. 8–9). The description seems to call for a perennial river rather than one that flowed only during the rainy season. But from the text, we know only that it was continually flowing during Lehi's sojourn in the valley; it may have dried up after the family moved on. Indeed, the "river of Egypt" mentioned in the Bible as marking the border between the land promised to Abraham and the land of Egypt¹ is considered by scholars to be the seasonal stream known as Wadi Arish, which runs through the Gaza strip. (The larger Nile River runs through the center of Egypt, not along its border.)

In May 1995, George Potter and Craig Thorsted identified

a small perennial stream flowing down Wadi Tayyib al-Isim and into the Red Sea near the Arabian town of al-Maqnah as the likely location of Lehi's sojourn in that region.² But is there ancient evidence for such a river?

About 440 BC, the Greek historian Herodotus wrote: "There is a large river in Arabia called the Corys, which issues into the Erythraean [Red] Sea. . . . The Arabian king had the hides of cows and other animals sewn together into a pipe, which was long enough to reach the desert from the river. Then he drew the water from the river through the pipe into big storage tanks, which had been excavated in the desert to receive and hold the water. It is twelve days' journey from the river to this desert, and he is supposed to have brought the water to three separate parts of the desert, through three pipes" (*Histories* 3.9).³ Although we cannot ascertain the location of this river (it may have been in the south, in Yemen),⁴ there are other ancient texts that mention rivers in the al-Maqnah region explored by Potter and Thorsted.

In the second century BC, Agatharchides of Cnidus, a Greek historian and geographer, wrote his treatise *On the Erythraean Sea*. The original

text has been lost over time, but portions were quoted by subsequent writers who had access to it.⁵ In this way, portions of Book 1 of his work have been preserved, while Book 5 has survived almost intact and gives a description of the horn of Africa and the lands adjoining the Red Sea. Describing the northwest Arabian coast near the Sinai peninsula, Agatharchides wrote:

After these places there is a well-watered plain which, because of the streams that flow through it everywhere, grows dog's tooth grass, lucerne and also lotus the height of a man. Because of the abundance and excellence of the pasturage it not only supports flocks and herds of all sorts in unspeakably great numbers but also wild camels and, in addition, deer and gazelles. In response to the abundance of animals which breed there, crowds of lions, wolves and leopards gather from the desert.⁶

Strabo, a Greek historian born in 63 BC, cited an earlier work by Artemidorus. After describing the region of northwestern Arabia near the island of Tiran and opposite the southern end of the Sinai peninsula, he wrote: "One comes next to a plain [about modern al-Maqnah] which is well supplied with trees and water and

is full of all kinds of domestic animals—mules among others; and it has a multitude of wild camels, deer, and gazelles, as also numerous lions, leopards, and wolves [jackals?]. Off this plain lies an island called Dia. Then one comes to a gulf about five hundred stadia in extent, which is enclosed all round by mountains and a mouth that is difficult to enter; and round it live men who hunt the land animals” (*Geography* 16.4.18).⁷ In the same section, Strabo mentioned a harbor named Charmothas (modern Umm Lajj) farther south along the same coast, saying that “a river flows into it.”⁸

These classical sources support the idea that there were rivers flowing in the western part of Arabia, both in Yemen to the south and in the land of Midian to the north, where Lehi encamped beside the river Laman. 📖

By John A. Tvedtnes

Senior Research Associate, FARMS

Notes

1. See Genesis 15:18; Numbers 34:5; Joshua 15:4, 47; 1 Kings 8:65; 2 Kings 24:7; 2 Chronicles 7:8. In some of these passages the Hebrew word rendered “river” is *nāhār*, the normal term for a river, while in others it is *nahal*, which usually denotes a seasonal stream in the same fashion as Arabic *wadi*. In the King James version of Isaiah 27:12, the rendering is “stream of Egypt.”
2. George D. Potter, “A New Candidate in Arabia for the Valley of Lemuel,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8/1 (1999): 54–63.
3. Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. Robin Waterfield (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 172.
4. Describing the region called Yemen in our day, Strabo wrote: “The extreme parts towards the south, lying opposite to Æthiopia, are watered by summer rains and are sowed twice, like India; and the rivers there are used up in supplying plains and lakes. The country is in general fertile, and abounds in particular with places for making honey; and, with the exception of horses and mules and hogs, it has an abundance of domesticated animals; and, with the exception of geese and chickens, has all kinds of birds” (*Geography* 16.4.2, in *The Geography of Strabo*, trans. Horace Leonard Jones [London: William Heinemann; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, Loeb Classical Library, 1966], 7:309–11).
5. The early writers who cited Agatharchides were Diodorus of Sicily (*Library of History*), Strabo (*Geography*), and Photius (*Bibliotheca*).
6. *Agatharchides of Cnidus: On the Erythraean Sea*, trans. and ed. Stanley Mayer Burstein (London: Hakluyt Society, 1989), 151–52.
7. In *The Geography of Strabo*, trans. Jones, 7:343.
8. *Ibid.*, 7:345.

CORROBORATIONS

More Gold Plates

Gold plates are not new to the ancient regions of Mesopotamia (Iraq) and Persia (Iran). The Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian kings left inscribed records on gold, silver, and bronze plates deposited in stone boxes buried beneath the foundations of their palaces.¹ Now a new set of gold plates has been unearthed at Bardak-e Siah, near Borazjan in the southern Bushehr province of Iran. The find consists of three thick plates of pure gold folded over, according to Iranian archaeologist Eshan Yaghmai, who has been working at the site for a number of years. Yaghmai believes that it is likely that, once unfolded, the plates will be found to be inscribed. The three plates, weighing a total of 6.6 pounds, were unearthed in April 2005 and, based on other datable artifacts found in association with the plates, are from about 500 BC.

Note

1. See H. Curtis Wright, “Ancient Burials of Metal Documents in Stone Boxes,” in *By Study and Also by Faith*, ed. John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 2:273–334.

New Book Chronicles Divine Manifestations

Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820–1844, recently published by BYU Press and Deseret Book, brings together for the first time all the known contemporaneous documents relevant to six key events of the restoration of the gospel. The sheer number of documents presented is impressive. In one convenient volume, all 13 known accounts of Joseph Smith’s first vision are given, 202 documents nail down the miraculously short time in which the Book of Mormon was translated, 70 accounts during the lifetimes of Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery mention the restoration of the priesthood, 76 visionary experiences of Joseph Smith are documented, 6 eyewitness accounts describe the manifestations at the Kirtland Temple, and 121 first- or secondhand testimonies tell of seeing the mantle of Joseph Smith fall on Brigham Young on 8 August 1844.

“The plan of the book is to allow the documents, as much as possible, to stand for themselves,” writes John W. Welch in the introduction. “Contemporaneous documents are critical in getting close to these key events. Firsthand accounts uniquely convey the spirit of these important occasions. Eyewitness reports provide precious details that help modern readers construct a vivid image of what transpired.” Welch, the founder of FARMS and a professor of law at BYU, edited the volume with help from Erick B. Carlson.

Of greatest interest to FARMS readers will be the longest chapter in the book, on the coming forth of the Book of Mormon (which now updates and supersedes a 1986 FARMS Preliminary Report entitled “The Translation of the Book of Mormon: Basic Historical Information”). An 18-page chronology details events from September 1827 (when Joseph obtained the plates) to March 1830 (when the Book of Mormon was printed). The documents themselves include accounts from scores of people, from the Smith and Whitmer families to newspaper reporters to Emma Smith’s hostile relatives. (Interestingly, even hostile accounts confirm that Joseph translated the book in a brief period of time and did not use source material.)

Edmund C. Briggs’s interview with Emma is representative of how informative and how fascinating these documents are:

When my husband was translating the Book of Mormon, I wrote a part of it, as he dictated each sentence, word for word, and when he came to proper names he could not pronounce, or long words, he spelled them out, and while I was writing them, if I made any mistake in spelling, he would stop me and correct my spelling, although it was impossible for him to see how I was writing them down at the time. Even the word Sarah he could not pronounce at first, but had to spell it, and I would pronounce it for him. (p. 129)

Each section in this volume includes an introductory essay accompanying the documents. The section on priesthood restoration, for example, opens with an essay by BYU associate professor of history Brian Q. Cannon, who discusses such topics as how Joseph’s and Oliver’s testimonies of John the Baptist’s visitation were used in missionary work, evidence suggesting that the Melchizedek Priesthood may have been restored in connection with the translation of the Book of Mormon (which models two levels of ordinations: one in 3 Nephi 11:22 and the other in 3 Nephi 18:37–38), and divergent conclusions regarding the timing of the appearance of Peter, James, and John.


Among the documents is a particularly powerful testimony from Oliver Cowdery. After a decade out of the church, Oliver and his family were reunited with the Saints when they arrived at a conference held near Council Bluffs, Iowa, on 21 October 1848. Addressing an audience of 2,000 people—the largest gathering of Saints he ever spoke to—Oliver stated:

The priesthood is here. I was present with Joseph when an holy angle from god came down from heaven and conferred or restored the Aronic priesthood. And said at the same time that it should remain upon the earth while the earth stands. I was also present with Joseph when the Melchisedek priesthood was conferred by the holy angles of god—this was the more necessary in order that by which we then confirmed on each other by the will and

commandment of god. This priesthood is also to remain upon the earth until, the Last remnant of time. (p. 244)

As with all other documents in the collection, this one is reproduced as it was originally recorded. In addition, each document is accompanied by an endnote that offers complete bibliographic information on the source (in this case the journal of Reuben Miller, which is housed in the Family and Church History Department Archives). A concluding bibliography provides details on articles pub-

lished in *BYU Studies* relating to many important events in early church history.

The authors of the chapters in *Opening the Heavens* are Dean C. Jessee, James B. Allen, John W. Welch, Brian Q. Cannon (with the *BYU Studies* staff), Alexander L. Baugh, Steven C. Harper, and Lynne Watkins Jorgensen. By compiling, transcribing, and carefully annotating hundreds of important documents, the authors and editors have produced a rare volume that will prove invaluable for many years to come to both general readers and scholars. 

Joseph Smith *cont. from page 1*

“As we address the meaning of Joseph Smith in the 21st century, such complex interweavings of experience, text, and history must figure in our narratives,” Bushman said. He then emphasized the need to examine Joseph Smith’s history in light of his own self-understanding. “His mind ranged far beyond his own time and place, and we will have to follow Joseph if we are to understand. A small history will not account for such a large man,” Bushman concluded.

Responding to Bushman’s paper, Robert V. Remini, an emeritus professor of history at the University of Illinois at Chicago and author of the 2002 book *Joseph Smith*, called Smith “the quintessential American” and Mormonism a religion that Americans “ought to be proud of.” Remini, who is not a Latter-day Saint, said that the Book of Mormon is a document in the long tradition of America’s founding documents from the Mayflower Compact to the Bill of Rights, giving Mormonism a clear and lasting identity that other American religions of the time lacked.

Richard T. Hughes, professor of religion at Pepperdine University and a specialist in 19th-century-American restoration movements, responded to Bushman’s paper by comparing Joseph Smith to Alexander Campbell. They both had a restoration vision but differed in how they implemented it. As a “child of the Enlightenment,” Campbell had no notion that God spoke to people through direct revelation, but rather through the

Bible, Hughes said. In contrast, Smith, more of a romantic than a rationalist, fused the two worlds of American and biblical culture in “a profound act of creative genius.” Though not a Latter-day Saint, Hughes agreed with Bushman that “any attempt to understand Joseph Smith exclusively in terms of his American setting is bound to fail.”

The next respondent, Grant Underwood, a BYU professor of history, advised caution in doing comparative studies that exaggerate similarities and urged historians to be immersed in extant sources. “In doing transnational comparisons, we must ever keep our feet firmly planted in Joseph Smith’s own time. . . . The more the cultural as well as verbal language of Joseph Smith is understood, in all of its depth and complexity, the more nuanced and compelling will be the comparative histories that are attached to the Prophet.”

Joseph Smith and the Recovery of Past Worlds

In opening remarks in the second session, Noel B. Reynolds, a BYU professor of political science and until recently the executive director of ISPART, noted that until 1829 none of the many reformers who undertook to reestablish the original teachings and practices of Jesus Christ had produced ancient texts in the biblical tradition. Early converts to the restored Church of Christ saw the Book of Mormon (and the other ancient texts that also came through Joseph Smith) as “clear evidence that [Joseph Smith] was sent by God in these latter days to restore his lost

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Joseph Smith cont. from page 5

teachings, practices, and authority that were necessary to prepare the world for the second coming of Jesus Christ,” Reynolds said. “While these claims have been soundly resisted by traditional Christians from the beginning, a growing body of serious scholars is convinced that these texts are in fact credible as ancient texts, and most of the alternative theories which have arisen from the early years have not found strong scholarly support in recent years.”

University of Richmond English professor Terryl L. Givens, author of *The Latter-day Saint Experience in America* (2004), addressed the topic “Joseph Smith: Prophecy, Process, and Plentitude.” A Latter-day Saint, he described how Joseph Smith challenged religious orthodoxy by revealing a “gospel plentitude” that contradicted notions of biblical sufficiency and collapsed the metaphysical space between God and man. “His major work was not, or not only, the correction or enunciation of particular theological principles,” Givens noted, “but the complete reconceptualization of the scope and sweep of gospel parameters themselves.” Something else is needed to understand Joseph Smith’s legacy than the development of critical tools and disciplinary sophistication, he said. “It may be that only with the passage of 200 years, or perhaps more, will we have enough distance from the career of Joseph Smith to adequately assess his contributions. . . . One simply has to step back from a canvas as large as the one he painted.”

Responding first to Givens’s paper was Margaret Barker, a recognized authority on the Old Testament and a Methodist preacher from England. She focused on the question of how the Book of Mormon measures up to its claimed roots in the ancient Near East. “If the wickedness in Jerusalem mentioned in the first book of Nephi was Josiah’s temple purges,” Barker said, “we should expect to find information relevant to Mormon tradition in texts outside the Bible. And we do.” She went on to discuss lost scripture, the absence of archaeological support for much of the history in the Old Testament, and differences in various versions of the earliest biblical texts.

Among other interesting parallels, Barker noted that an ancient text discovered in Egypt in 1945 describes the tree of life as beautiful, fiery, and having white grapes. Such mention of white fruit does not exist in any other ancient source she knows of except the Book of Mormon (see 1 Nephi 8:11). She sees other connections between the tree of life visions therein and ancient Asherah/Wisdom traditions: “The revelation to Joseph Smith was the exact ancient wisdom symbolism intact and almost certainly as it was known in 600 BCE.”

The next respondent to Givens’s paper was John E. Clark, a professor of anthropology at BYU and a prominent Mesoamerican archaeologist. He emphasized that believers and critics alike who inflate Joseph Smith’s abilities ignore the most compelling evidence of the Book of Mormon’s authenticity—Smith’s unfamiliarity with its contents. “Many things we now most cherish about the book were simply unknowable in 1830,” he said. Of a large body of relatively recent findings supporting the book’s claims to ancient origins, Clark’s paper focused on evidence of place, time, and population.

He showed a graph that plotted the status of evidence for and against the authenticity of the Book of Mormon over time. Since 1900 the “book as fiction” line has been steadily dropping while the “book as history” line moves up as new archaeological evidence comes to light. Mesoamerica was clearly the most densely populated spot in the Americas, with an “order of magnitude [in the millions] that supports the plausibility of Book of Mormon demography.” Comparing the Jaredites with the lowland Olmecs, two ancient peoples that disappeared from the scene at the same time and share many other characteristics, Clark said, “The correlation is stunning.”

Among many other Book of Mormon claims confirmed since 1900, Clark listed steel swords and metal plates from the Near East and, in the New World, barley, cement, highways, military regalia, assorted weapons, Hebrew words, and evidence of reading and writing—findings that “constitute a strong and even compelling case that the Book of Mormon is an ancient Mesoamerican record,” he said.

John W. Welch, the Robert K. Thomas Professor of Law at BYU and founder of FARMS, agreed with Givens that the texts restored through Joseph Smith must submit to examination as the historical records they purport to be. But who will judge the merits of the evidence, and on what basis? he asked. He noted many compelling evidences (e.g., chiasmus in Alma 36, some 40 elements in the Book of Abraham that are not found in the Bible but turn up in obscure Jewish and Islamic traditions, an inscribed silver scroll dating to Lehi's time, a seventh-century-BC altar in Yemen bearing the name *Nahom*) but emphasized that not all the evidence is in and that arguments can always be made on both sides. "Good science takes time. We need to wait for conclusive answers that still evade us. Indeed, in all matters of religious faith, important evidence will always be lacking," he said.

Responding to Givens's point that historians might profitably focus on the process rather than the product of Joseph Smith's thought, Welch identified 10 "dynamics" that figured into the Prophet's revelatory process. He concluded by discussing Joseph Smith's unprecedented claim to priesthood authority and how his concept of lines of authority attaches him more to the past than to his own time. "More potent in the minds of his followers than his truth claims was the attraction of his [priesthood] power claims," Welch said. "It would seem that nothing was more important to Joseph's perception of his own mission than the recovery of lost priesthood authority. . . . He saw the past as the repository of divine powers, and the recovery of that authority has everything to do with what the past meant to the essential Joseph Smith."

Joseph Smith in a Personal World


The third session, on the personal dimensions of Joseph Smith's life and legacies, was a special opportunity for participants to hear Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles speak on the importance of revelation in the church and in people's personal lives. "A major focus in my personal view of Joseph Smith is his role as a prophet and his teachings on the reality of revelation," Elder Oaks said. He noted that Joseph Smith taught that he was directed by

a continuing flow of revelation throughout his life and that everyone could enjoy personal revelation in their own lives.

Revelation is the principal difference between Latter-day Saints and those of other faiths, Elder Oaks said. "This is not a technicality; for us it is big. It is the foundation of our church doctrine and governance, and it is also fundamental to personal conversion, personal decision making, and how we understand and apply the inspired texts we call scriptures." Joseph Smith, like George Washington, "got the big things right" because his mind was "uncluttered with sophisticated intellectual preconceptions," said Elder Oaks, who attributes the genius of the unlearned Mormon prophet to revelation from God.

Among other things, Elder Oaks discussed the concept of an open canon and the difference between public and private revelation. He noted that learned commentaries on the scriptures help with interpretation but that spiritual nourishment comes from personal revelation. "Latter-day Saints believe that, as a source of sacred knowledge, the scriptures are not the ultimate but the penultimate. The ultimate knowledge comes by personal revelation through the Holy Ghost. . . . The scriptures, which are the revelation of the past, cannot be understood without openness to the revelations of the present."

An exhibit outside the conference hall featured books, manuscripts, and artifacts relating to Joseph Smith and the church, including the 1829 copyright application of the Book of Mormon and a proof sheet of its title page.

Cosponsoring the event were Brigham Young University, the Public Affairs Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, BYU Studies, and BYU's Richard L. Evans Chair of Religious Understanding. The conference proceedings, which were made available in real time to people worldwide via the Internet, can be accessed in both audio and video formats at www.lds.org. Transcripts of the proceedings of this conference are being prepared by BYU Studies for publication at a later date. 

Journey of Faith cont. from page 7

has directed such films as *A More Perfect Union* (winner of a regional Emmy award and nominated for a national Emmy) and the highly acclaimed *Mountain of the Lord*.

“I look at these FARMS scholars as detectives who have for years been searching and finding amazing clues that support and bolster the Book of Mormon account,” Johnson said. “They’ve published their findings in journal articles and books, but we now have the opportunity to present their stunning discoveries visually on film so they will be accessible in a compelling way to many, many more people.”

The filming took place in Israel, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Oman, Guatemala, and Mexico. The project was delayed following the bombing of the USS *Cole* and again in the wake of 9/11 but has since progressed to the final stages of scoring music, creating artistic backdrops, and film editing. Barring unforeseen production delays, *Journey of Faith* is scheduled to be released in the fall.

Johnson has felt a keen sense of purpose in the project from the start and is excited to see it nearing completion. Experiencing parts of Lehi’s trail through Arabia firsthand has heightened his appreciation not only of the hardships confronting Lehi’s party but also of the Book of Mormon in general.

“Now I read Nephi’s narrative with new eyes and am confident that others will too after seeing this film,” he said. “Set in its real-world context through the efforts of dedicated scholars and quality filmmaking, the Book of Mormon takes on added luster.” 📺

PUBLICATIONS

Early Christians in Disarray, edited by Noel B. Reynolds, presents new research on the apostasy. Studies by several Latter-day Saint scholars in different fields explore the root causes of the apostasy and identify several common myths and misconceptions that Latter-day Saints share on this subject. The authors argue that the apostasy began as early as the first century AD. The volume is not a comprehensive or final treatment of the issues, but is designed to support and encourage further systematic research on the apostasy. Available in bookstores now.

Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part 2: 2 Nephi 11–Mosiah 16, by Royal Skousen, is the second part of volume 4 of the Book of Mormon Critical Text Project. It continues with the analysis of every significant nongrammatical variant in the original and printer’s manuscripts and in 20 important editions of the Book of Mormon (from the 1830 edition to the 1981 edition). The task of this volume is to use the earliest textual sources and patterns of systematic usage to recover the original English-language text of the Book of Mormon. Available in bookstores in August.

Insights

A Window on the Ancient World
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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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