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# Insights

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## New Directors Appointed for ISPART and FARMS

In June Brigham Young University announced the appointment of Andrew C. Skinner as the new executive director of the Institute for the Study and Preservation of Ancient Religious Texts. Skinner, a professor of ancient scripture at BYU who has served as dean of Religious Education since 2000, replaces Noel B. Reynolds, who was called to preside over the Florida Fort Lauderdale Mission of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Skinner's academic accomplishments and administrative experience uniquely qualify him to direct the work of ISPART. His principal research languages are Hebrew and Aramaic. He has expertise in ancient Near Eastern history, the Hebrew Bible, and the Dead Sea Scrolls—areas of study that align nicely with the research interests of ISPART and FARMS. He is the author or coauthor of more than 100 publications and has filled three teaching assignments at the BYU Jerusalem Center. Prior to his appointment as dean of Religious Education, he served as chair of the Department of Ancient Scripture.



Andrew C. Skinner



S. Kent Brown

Born and raised in Colorado, Skinner earned a BA in history from the University of Colorado. He went on to earn an MA in Jewish studies from the Iliff School of Theology and a ThM (master of theology) from Harvard, where he specialized in Biblical Hebrew. He did graduate work at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem and received his PhD from the University of Denver, where he studied Near Eastern and European history and specialized in Judaism. He has been a bishop in Colorado and Utah, and he is a member of the Correlation Evaluation Committee of the Church.

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## New Volume Explores Themes, Background of Book of Abraham

*Astronomy, Papyrus, and Covenant*, the third volume in FARMS's Studies in the Book of Abraham, was recently published and is now available. This book deals with three broad themes: astronomy in the Book of Abraham, the background of the Joseph Smith Papyri, and the nature of the Abrahamic covenant. In the course of treating these subjects, various papers discuss Jews in Ptolemaic Egypt, commonalities between the Book of Abraham and ancient Islamic texts, accounts of Abra-

ham in 19th-century America, and a number of other interesting issues. All but 3 of the 12 articles were initially presented as papers at a BYU conference on the Book of Abraham.

The book was edited by John Gee and Brian M. Hauglid, both of whom also contributed articles. Additional authors include William J. Hamblin, J. Ward Moody, Daniel C. Peterson, and Michael D. Rhodes.

One of the major features of the Book of Abraham is its treatment of ancient astronomy, an aspect of Abraham's teachings not recounted in the biblical narrative but one that does appear in noncanonical

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“I look forward to working more closely with the fine scholars and other valued personnel at ISPART, who all have done so much through the years to establish the high reputation of solid, rigorous scholarship and quality publication that the organization enjoys,” Skinner said.

Working alongside Skinner in his new role as executive director of ISPART are M. Gerald Bradford, associate executive director, and Alison V. P. Coutts, assistant executive director. Established in 2001, ISPART is the administrative organization that oversees the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS) and its sister organizations, the Center for the Preservation of Ancient Religious Texts (CPART) and the Middle Eastern Texts Initiative (METI).

Noel Reynolds served as president of FARMS from 1991 to 1998, succeeding Stephen D. Ricks (1988–1991) and John W. Welch (1979–1988). When Reynolds was appointed associate academic vice president for undergraduate studies at BYU in 1998, Daniel Oswald succeeded him as president/director of FARMS. In 2003 Reynolds returned to function as both director of FARMS and executive director of ISPART.

A Harvard-educated professor of political science with a keen interest in Book of Mormon studies, Reynolds will be remembered for many signal achievements during his years at FARMS. Besides his scholarly essays and his editor- and coauthorship of *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited* (1997) and *Early Christians in Disarray: Contemporary LDS Perspectives on the Christian Apostasy* (2005), he played key roles in organizing scholarly conferences, directing and funding research projects, and guiding FARMS as it faced significant opportunities and challenges owing to its rapid growth in resources, projects, and staff and its changing relationship with BYU, culminating in the invitation for FARMS to become part of the university.

With Reynolds’s departure, the BYU administration decided to appoint a separate director of FARMS: S. Kent Brown, a professor of ancient scripture at BYU and current director of Ancient Studies on campus. Brown is the editor of FARMS’s *Journal*

*of Book of Mormon Studies* and has been a member of the FARMS Board of Directors since 2003.

Brown earned a BA in Classical Greek, with a minor in Near Eastern languages, from the University of California at Berkeley in 1967. In 1972 he received his PhD from Brown University, with an emphasis in New Testament and Early Christian studies. He has taught at BYU since 1971. In 1978 and 1979 he and his family lived in Cairo, where, as a fellow of the American Research Center in Egypt, he worked on the collection of ostraca at the Coptic Museum. From 1982 to 1985 he served as chair of the Department of Ancient Scripture and then worked two years as director of publications for the Religious Studies Center.

From 1984 to 1990 Brown led a project sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Mormon Archaeology and Research Foundation to microfilm more than 1,500 ancient Christian manuscripts in Cairo and Jerusalem. He has also been a fellow of both the BYU Jerusalem Center in Israel and the David M. Kennedy Center for International Studies in Provo. Brown was the director of the BYU Jerusalem Center from 1993 to 1996.

His most recent project was the production of the groundbreaking 90-minute documentary *Journey of Faith*, which traces the probable route of Lehi’s family through Arabia and on to the promised land.

“In the future, I can see FARMS becoming involved with the production of documentary films that review in a positive light our scriptural heritage, particularly the Book of Mormon,” Brown said. “The release of the film *Journey of Faith* stands as a bold first step onto this stage.”

Brown fully expects FARMS’s long-standing research focus on the Book of Mormon to continue. “I live with a sense that we have penetrated only a small portion of the living world of the Book of Mormon,” he said. “Occasionally I read an expression that leaves me wondering what it represents in the life experiences of its author. In my opinion, we shall yet see many thoughtful, careful studies on fresh topics as well as reassessments and refinements of previously published conclusions.”

We wish our esteemed directors continued success as they settle into their new responsibilities of directing the research and publication interests of ISPART and FARMS. 