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

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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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## Archaic Vocabulary cont. from page 5

extant here) spelled *sermon* as *cermon*, which was then misread as *ceremony* (and spelled as *cerimony*) when Oliver Cowdery copied the word from the original manuscript into the printer's manuscript. Such a conjectural emendation is possible once we recognize that the vocabulary for the original Book of Mormon text dates from the 1500s and 1600s.

A second possible misinterpretation deals with the expression “the pleasing bar of God,” as found in Jacob 6:13 (and similarly in Moroni 10:34 as “the pleasing bar of the great Jehovah”). In part 2 of volume 4 of the critical text (this part was published in August of this year), under Jacob 6:13, I argue that *the pleasing bar* is actually a mistake for *the pleading bar*. An abbreviated description of the evidence for emending the text to *the pleading bar* was initially presented in 2004 and can be found in a previous issue of the FARMS publication *Insights* (vol. 24, no. 4, pp. 2–3). This conjectural emendation was first proposed by Christian Gellinek in 2003. There are no uses of the term *pleasing bar* anywhere on the Internet except in reference to the Book of Mormon, yet there is clear evidence that the legal term *pleading bar* was used in the 1600s. And as might be expected, no instances of *pleading bar* have thus

far been found during the 1800s, in either England or the United States. But such a conjectural emendation is consistent with the hypothesis that the vocabulary of the Book of Mormon dates from Early Modern English.

These new findings argue that Joseph Smith was not the author of the English-language translation of the Book of Mormon. Not only was the text revealed to him word for word, but the words themselves sometimes had meanings that he and his scribes would not have known, which occasionally led to misinterpretation. The Book of Mormon is not a 19th-century text, nor is it Joseph Smith's. The English-language text was revealed through him, but it was not precisely in his language or ours.

In this article, I have briefly listed some of the examples of the original archaic language in the Book of Mormon. A complete discussion of this issue will eventually appear in volume 3 of the critical text, *The History of the Text of the Book of Mormon*. Many of these examples, especially those that involve textual variation, are discussed in volume 4, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon*, now in the process of being published. 

### By Royal Skousen

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## Book of Abraham cont. from page 1

traditions about the patriarch. One paper situates the astronomical accounts in the Book of Abraham among ancient geocentric astronomies, while another argues heliocentric conceptions from contemporary physics to elucidate the same subject. Other papers deal with such subjects as the metaphors of stars and cedars in ancient accounts about Abraham and the question of whether certain scriptural creation stories are allegorical.

The nature of the connection between the Joseph Smith Papyri and the Book of Abraham continues to be a matter of interest and discussion, and several articles in the volume address issues associated with the papyri and their background. One paper, for example, discusses ancient

Semitic adaptations of Egyptian iconography and raises the issue of whether an Egyptological interpretation of the facsimiles from the Book of Abraham is relevant.

The Abrahamic covenant, of course, is one of the most important themes dealt with in the Book of Abraham. Various articles treat such topics as the role of women in the Abrahamic covenant and Abraham's redemption in light of the covenant.

Fifteen different scholars—including astronomers, Egyptologists, and historians—contributed to this volume. The two previous titles in this series are *Traditions about the Early Life of Abraham* and *The Hor Book of Breathings: A Translation and Commentary*. To order the book online, visit the FARMS Web site ([farms.byu.edu](http://farms.byu.edu)) and click on the link for the book. 