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## FARMS Review Takes Up Nibley, DNA, Book of Mormon Origins

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# Insights

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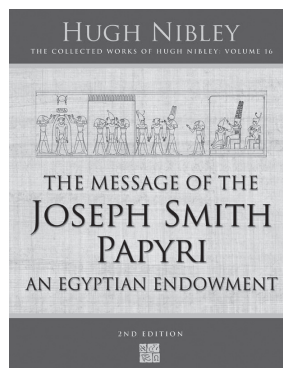
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## Nibley Classic on Papyri Given New Life in Second Edition

After years of intense effort, the long-overdue second edition of Hugh Nibley's 1975 book *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment* is at press. This new edition has been meticulously prepared by BYU Egyptologists John Gee and Michael D. Rhodes, who upgraded this Nibley classic on many points (some unseen, others impossible to miss, such as the superior illustrations by Michael Lyon) while preserving the original content. Published by FARMS and Deseret Book, this edition is a fitting tribute to Nibley's pioneering work and will enable a new generation of students and scholars to profit from Nibley's enduring insights into an area of perennial interest for Latter-day Saints.

*Message* was a book ahead of its time. With the rediscovery of the Joseph Smith Papyri in 1967, critics who supposed a papyrus fragment to be the source of the Book of Abraham claimed that a lack

of correspondence between the two texts proved the latter a fraud. In introductory remarks to the 1975 edition, Nibley noted this "great fuss . . . over a scrap of papyrus" and how "no one could care less about what the papyrus in question had to offer in its own right—and it is in fact a most singular document."



Thus Nibley's focus in *Message* is on what the papyri are rather than on what they are not. The papyri are the earliest example of ancient Egyptian religious writings known as the Book of Breathings Made by Isis. *Message* contains full reproductions and translations of Joseph Smith Papyri XI and X and of Louvre Papyrus No. 3284, the best-known complete manuscript of the Book of Breathings Made by Isis.

By far the largest portion of the book is Nibley's commentary on the Book of Breathings Made by Isis, a text that "is neither the Book of Abraham nor the source for the Book of Abraham, as Nibley himself clearly demonstrated," writes John Gee in his introduction to the new edition. "Some

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## FARMS Review Takes Up Nibley, DNA, Book of Mormon Origins

The latest issue of the *FARMS Review* (vol. 17, no. 1) is now available, offering its usual in-depth, incisive commentary on an array of recent publications and topics of interest to Latter-day Saint readers.

This is the first issue published since Hugh Nibley's death earlier this year, and Louis Midgley's tribute to this illustrious Latter-day Saint scholar has already proved to be one of the more popular contributions. The essay is essentially an intellectual

autobiography in which Midgley (BYU professor emeritus of political science and associate editor of the *Review*) tells of his first encounter with Nibley, in 1949; his subsequent studies under Sterling McMurrin, a prominent philosophy professor at the University of Utah who dismissed the Book of Mormon out of hand; his dissertation on the work of theologian Paul Tillich, who viewed God not as a personality but as the ultimate ground of being; and of Nibley's profound influence.

"My encounters with Nibley, then McMurrin, and eventually Tillich," writes Midgley, "taught me

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it may pinpoint the location of the missing passage from Isaiah as having been in Isaiah 25:8 after the words “He will swallow up death in victory,” or perhaps at the very end of the verse, inasmuch as that would appear to be more contextually appropriate.

Regardless of the exact location of the suspected missing text from Isaiah, the *Gospel of Nicodemus* provides some evidence that both Paul and certain Book of Mormon prophets were, in fact, referring to an earlier, common source in Isa-

iah when they made reference to the “sting of death.”

Given that the Book of Mormon quotes copiously from Isaiah and puts such high stock in all of Isaiah’s writings (see 3 Nephi 23:1), which the Nephites had with them on the brass plates (see 1 Nephi 5:13), the fact that three Book of Mormon prophets allude to this same quotation possibly from Isaiah is not surprising. What is pleasantly surprising is that one more subtle indication of the Book of Mormon’s authenticity sheds light not only on

an apparently missing passage from Isaiah, but also on the content of the brass plates. 📖

### By Corbin T. Volluz

Senior deputy prosecuting attorney for Skagit County, Washington.

#### Notes

1. *Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Acta Pilati,” online edition, 2003.
2. *The Lost Books of the Bible* (New York: Bell, 1979), 9.
3. *Gospel of Nicodemus* 13:4,5; 16:7; 13:11,7, respectively (in *Lost Books*, 80–81, 83).
4. *Ibid.*, 16:9–12 (in *Lost Books*, 83–84).

FEATURE CONTINUED

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that it is a grand mistake to turn the Christian story into theology bounded by ontological categories. My own efforts to defend the historical authenticity of the Book of Mormon and hence also Joseph Smith’s prophetic truth claims flow directly from these early insights.”

Nibley’s scholarship is also a key topic in the reviews of Martha Beck’s *Leaving the Saints: How I Lost the Mormons and Found My Faith*, by Kent Jackson (professor of ancient scripture, BYU) and Gregory Taggart (lecturer in the Honors University Writing program, BYU). Beck uses her book as a platform for attacking her father, Hugh Nibley, and his scholarship, although she does not mention him by name. Jackson notes there are “serious and insurmountable problems” with Beck’s story of “a man in a tweed jacket” who supposedly approached her in a grocery store and claimed that as a source checker for her father’s publisher he had discovered that at least 90 percent of Nibley’s footnotes were complete fabrications. As Jackson (himself critical of Nibley’s scholarship) points out, however, Beck’s claims can easily be checked because Nibley’s books are still in print and because the source checkers are listed by name in the publications

and can be contacted. “Nowhere in my examination of [Nibley’s] research and writing,” writes Jackson, “did I find any hint of his making up sources for fictional references.”

An anti-Mormon book that has shared the recent spotlight with Beck’s *Leaving the Saints* is Simon G. Southerton’s *Losing a Lost Tribe: Native Americans, DNA, and the Mormon Church*, which critics have employed to supposedly demonstrate that DNA research shows the Book of Mormon to be false. Southerton states that “the question of whether or not Jews or members of the Ten Lost Tribes anciently found their way to the New World is susceptible to examination using DNA technology” (*Lost Tribe*, 118).

In his review of Southerton’s book, Ryan Parr, who holds a PhD in biological anthropology and is currently vice president of Research and Development at a Canadian biotechnical company, argues that such a proposition “indicates an ignorance of the complexities of population dynamics.” He goes on to explain that “the ideal of obtaining samples from a continuous biological breeding population is rarely, if ever, met.” Parr concludes that “nothing within the Book of Mormon precludes an Asian ancestry for Native Americans” and that “the insistence that the presence of small groups from the

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## *FARMS Review* cont. from page 3

ancient Near East must absolutely be present in the current genetic record of Native Americans, as a means of testing the authenticity of the Book of Mormon, is an unrealistic expectation.”

Two other books that have stirred their share of controversy are Clyde R. Forsberg Jr.’s *Equal Rites: The Book of Mormon, Masonry, Gender, and American Culture* (which views the Book of Mormon as a pro-Masonic tract) and Dan Vogel’s *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet* (which views it as Joseph Smith’s commentary on his troubled youth). Both are reviewed in this issue. Other reviews cover such topics as early accounts of Moroni’s visits to Joseph Smith, the relationship between science and religious belief, and the fate of those who never learned of Christ during mortality.

## Nibley Classic cont. from page 1


individuals were under the delusion that it was, and so Nibley had to show that it is not. . . . For Nibley, the Book of Breathings itself is interesting and deserves to be investigated for what it is rather than what it is not, a trap that some Egyptologists still fall into.”

Nibley goes into immense detail, drawing on ancient and modern sources to explicate the text. He sees the Book of Breathings not merely as a funerary text but as a manual for an initiate to the ancient temple. On Egyptian temple initiation, Nibley was ahead of his time, and the topic has since become mainstream in the discipline. In his penetrating analysis, Nibley is at his best, sharing provocative insights and displaying his legendary erudition in history and ancient languages.

According to Gee, “Nibley was asking the right questions and answering both to the best of his ability and to the best of anyone’s ability at the time. . . . Nibley’s period piece remains a treasure trove of useful information and insights.”

Nibley invites readers to discover for themselves certain parallels to modern temple ritual. “If the Egyptian endowment was but an imitation, it was still a good one,” he writes, “and we may be

Like Midgley’s tribute to Nibley, Dilworth B. Parkinson’s “We Have Received, and We Need No More,” is a stand-alone article rather than a book review. Originally presented as a BYU devotional address, this engaging essay identifies several “important lessons by comparing the process of trying to learn a language to the process of trying to learn the gospel.” Parkinson, a BYU professor of Arabic, concludes that “no matter how much progress we have made, . . . we need more. We need a firmer witness, a clearer and deeper understanding, and a more practical, heart-changing incorporation of almost any gospel principle we could contemplate.”

For information on viewing this issue of the *FARMS Review* online (a benefit of subscription) or on purchasing a copy, visit the FARMS Web site ([farms.byu.edu](http://farms.byu.edu)). 

able to learn much from it, just as we may learn much about the early church from the vagaries of the Gnostics. But it is not for a moment to be equated with the true and celestial order of things.”

This new edition has been reformatted for optimal clarity and effectiveness of presentation. The extensive references have been carefully rechecked and found to be exceptionally accurate. Under the supervision of artist and art historian Michael Lyon, nearly all of the illustrations have been redrawn or replaced with new photographs. The Egyptian transliterations have been standardized, and many deletions found in Nibley’s original drafts have been restored, including several pages relating to the atonement of Jesus Christ.

“What we as editors have not done, except in rare cases in footnotes, is to update Nibley,” Gee explains. “To do so would have been to make the work the editors’ rather than Nibley’s.”

While much has changed in the field of Egyptology since 1975, Nibley’s study remains a landmark for its depth of analysis and stunning insights into unique religious writings from the ancient world that merit our appreciation and scrutiny. To obtain this book, use the enclosed order form or order online by visiting the FARMS Web site ([farms.byu.edu](http://farms.byu.edu)) and clicking on the link for the book. 