



# Insights: The Newsletter of the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship

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## BYU and Institute Projects Showcased at AAR/SBL Meetings

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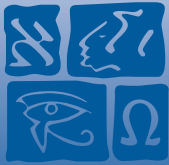
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# Insights

A WINDOW ON THE ANCIENT WORLD

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<http://farms.byu.edu>

## BYU and Institute Projects Showcased at AAR/SBL Meetings

BYU and Institute scholars gave presentations at all five sessions of the Rocky Mountain–Great Plains regional meeting of the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature on 26–27 March 2004. Because several sessions took place on the BYU campus for the first time, and because one-third of the 51 presenters were BYU-affiliated scholars (8 of them closely associated with the Institute), the event was an ideal opportunity for the university to showcase its contributions to religious scholarship.

According to Thomas Wayment, a BYU assistant professor of ancient scripture who chaired the event, many AAR/SBL officers at the national level (such as the current president and director of SBL) come from

the Rocky Mountain–Great Plains region. “In this regard, it was an important move on our part to bring the regional meeting here—so that leading scholars from around the nation could have the opportunity to see the type of work that is going on here at BYU,” Wayment said. “To say it mildly, they were very impressed with what is being done here on campus.”

The Institute’s work of digitally imaging ancient manuscripts was one of two BYU projects that caught the attention of participants. “One attendee (a national officer) was so impressed that she promised to promote the work of BYU at the national level,” said Wayment, who added that the informative presentation further solidified BYU’s already-strong position in that field. The other project that attracted attention was the Joseph Smith Papers Project of the Joseph Fielding

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## ‘Binding of Isaac’ Focus of FARMS Conference, Lecture

### *Akedah* Conference

Genesis 22 records that God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac upon an altar but intervened at the last moment, providing instead a ram for the actual sacrifice and greatly blessing Abraham for passing what has come to be viewed as the ultimate test of obedience to God’s will. The account, simple enough in outline, is nevertheless seen by different religious traditions as profoundly symbolic and even enigmatic, its moral and religious implications having spawned numerous interpretations.

Known as the *Akedah* (Hebrew, “the binding”), this dramatic episode is of central importance to Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. It is of no less consequence to Latter-day Saint Christians, whose scriptural canon, though it does very little to elu-

cidate the *Akedah* beyond what is known from the biblical account, supports that account while providing significant new revelation on Abraham’s ministry and stature in religious history in general.

Latter-day Saint researchers who have studied the *Akedah* shared their findings at a conference held at Brigham Young University on 6 March 2004. Sponsored by FARMS and BYU’s Religious Studies Center, the six-hour event titled “Genesis 22: Latter-day Saint Perspectives on the Binding of Isaac” began with a showing of the film *Akedah (The Binding)* and then featured 14 presentations in five sessions.

In opening remarks, Brian M. Hauglid, an assistant professor of ancient scripture at BYU, noted that Elder Neal A. Maxwell spoke of “relevance in antiquity” and that the clear relevance of the *Akedah* was that Abraham’s obedience to God in the near sacrifice of Isaac is a similitude of the sacrifice of the Son of God (Jacob 4:5). From that common ground, the presenters probed the *Akedah* from many angles,

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## AAR/SBL cont. from page 1

Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History. This research intrigued non-Latter-day Saint scholars in attendance because of the potential they see in it for “affecting scholarship on Mormons and Mormonism in general,” Wayment said.

Brief reports of the presentations by BYU scholars and other specialists working on Institute-sponsored projects follow. Titles of presentations appear in quotation marks, and the order of the reports is chronological.

- *Daniel C. Peterson, professor of Islamic studies and Arabic and director of METI; topic: “Yahyā b. ‘Adī and The Reformation of Morals.”* Yahyā, a 10th-century Arab Christian author, discusses in his book (published in English translation in 2002 in BYU’s Eastern Christian Texts series) specific social virtues and vices and offers sage practical advice on how to cultivate moral perfection. He echoes earlier Hellenistic notions of the philosophical or reasonable way of life, setting forth a nondenominational or ecumenical view of human virtue. Presumably, Yahyā hoped to appeal to both Christians and Muslims in the imperial capital of Baghdad where he taught and worked, and found in Hellenistic thinking possible common ground for ethics in a religiously divided society.

- *Brian M. Hauglid, assistant professor of ancient scripture, co-principal investigator with John Gee on FARMS’s Book of Abraham Research and Publication Project; topic: “The Biblical Muhammad and the Islamic Abraham.”* Muslims in the ninth through eleventh centuries did a two-fold (overlapping) creative process of Islamization of early texts. One creative process composed the biography of Muhammad in such a way that it biblicalized his life story, placing him within the context of biblical prophets. Examples of biblical themes include his birth and childhood, his call and preaching, the persecution he endured, and his eventual triumph in Mecca. Another creative process rewrote the stories of biblical prophets (Abraham was Hauglid’s focus) in order to support the Islamic message (monotheism vs. idolatry). In these ways, Muhammad, the Qur’an, and the rise of Islam reinforce the conception of Islam as the rightful successor to Judaism and Christianity.

- *Steven W. Booras, Institute technical operations manager; Roger T. Macfarlane, associate professor, chair of the Department of Humanities, Classics, and Comparative Literature; and Kristian Heal, director of CPART; topic: “At the Nexus of Technology and Scholarship: How Technology Is Changing the Way We Can Work.”* The Institute is succeeding in its efforts to bring scholars in closer contact with manuscript resources for the study of the ancient world. One example is the Dead Sea Scrolls database, which allows scholars to search, for example, for technical terms and to verify the standard transcription of the scrolls by checking photographs directly. Another example is the Institute’s recent copublication of a DVD containing complete electronic facsimiles of 33 Syriac manuscripts totaling more than 14,000 pages of text. (Syriac is the Aramaic dialect spoken and written by Christians in the Middle East before the rise of Islam.) This publication is the result of a joint BYU–Vatican Apostolic Library initiative to facilitate greater access to the Library’s considerable manuscript treasures.


- *John Gee, William “Bill” Gay Assistant Research Professor of Egyptology; topic: “Initiation and the Egyptian Temple.”* The daily temple liturgy from Karnak, Egypt, distinguishes between rituals that can be performed by a priest (*wʿb*) and others that must be performed by a prophet (*Ḥm-nṯr*). The distinction demarcates which areas of the temple may be entered by which grade of priest. Records of initiation from the same time and place and whose phraseology interlocks with the temple liturgy and with passages in the Book of the Dead relating to initiation enable scholars to reconstruct something of the temple initiation and its practical importance to everyday life in the temple.

- *John A. Tvedtnes, Institute senior resident scholar; topic: “The Reforms of Tiglath-pileser III and Their Influence on Ancient Israel.”* In 737 BC, the Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser III, seeking to strengthen his growing empire, initiated a series of reforms that have proved to be enduring. These included creating a standing army, placing Assyrian officials in capital cities, establishing a postal and spy network, bringing royal offspring of vas-

sal kings to the Assyrian capital for enculturation, replacing deceased vassal kings with loyal princes, and sending prisoners of war to settle distant lands, thus breaking their ties with their homeland and the local deities. Tiglath-pileser's reforms remained in place with his successors and with the kingdoms of Babylon and Persia that came to rule the region after the Assyrians. Thus we find the Babylonians taking Jewish kings and princes as hostages (e.g., Daniel and his friends) and replacing Jewish kings at will. People from Israel and Judah were deported to other parts of the Assyrian and Babylonian empires, leading to the Diaspora. The taking of hostages still occurs in the Middle East, and Tiglath-pileser's standing army, postal system, and spy network remain part of modern civilization.

• *John W. Welch, Robert K. Thomas Professor of Law; topic: "The Bible in American Law."* For centuries, the Bible was considered an integral part of the law, and therefore its foundational influence was systemic and organic. To a degree that may be surprising to some people, many biblical concepts concerning law, ethics, civil liberties, judicial procedures, government, and society continue to provide significant ingredients in the American images of justice, mercy, rights, duties, and the common law. For example, the right against self-incrimination

found in the Fifth Amendment grew out of Roman, Canon, and Jewish law, but William Tyndale can be credited for launching its adoption into English law. His English translation of the Bible (1525) and exposition on "swear not" in Matthew 5–7 (1530) boldly asserted that scripture rejects the idea of compelling a person to bear witness against himself. The case of the adulteress in John 8 was also influential in showing that Jesus did not require her to testify for or against herself. From such developments, the right against self-incrimination found its way into the American Constitution. Biblical provisions do not, and in many cases should not, control American law, but neither can nor should they be eliminated from the realities of American law.

Besides turning a spotlight on religious studies at BYU and providing faculty and Institute scholars with opportunities to develop professional contacts and keep abreast of research in their fields, the regional meeting may yet yield more tangible benefits. "One of the nice things about the regional meetings is that they are small enough to encourage discussions after the presentations," Wayment said. "As a result, several publication opportunities were made available to BYU faculty who presented at the meeting." 

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## 'Binding of Isaac' cont. from p. 1

illustrating the truth of Old Testament scholar Gordon Wenham's observation (quoted by David Bokovoy in the first session) that "no other episode in the Old Testament can match the sacrifice of Isaac in its haunting beauty or theological depth."

Topics included art, archaeology, and Jewish and Christian interpretations of the *Akedah*. The contributors were David Bokovoy, Jeffrey R. Chadwick, E. Douglas Clark (his paper was read by his brother), David C. Dollahite, Blair Van Dyke, John Gee, Jared M. Halverson, Amy Hardison, Kristian Heal, Jared Ludlow, Daniel B. McKinlay, Stephen D. Ricks (with Michael Lyon), John S. Thompson, John A. Tvedtnes, and Camille S. Williams.

## James Kugel Lecture

A week after the conference, world-renowned biblical scholar James Kugel gave a lecture at BYU on "The Angels That Wept at the Binding of Isaac: Some Reflections on a Curious Text from the Dead Sea Scrolls." Formerly the Harry Starr Professor of Classical, Modern Jewish, and Hebrew Literature at Harvard University, Kugel is a professor of the Bible at Bar Ilan University in Israel. He discussed how Abraham's offering of Isaac is an example of a story transformed by ancient interpreters beginning in the third century BC. To preclude any mistake in how the missing Hebrew consonants should be read in a certain line in the account, the interpreters added "to everyone" in "I have made known to everyone that you [Abraham] are faithful to me [the Lord] in

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