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## FARMS Review Offers Wide Coverage, Thoughtful Analysis

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# Insights

A WINDOW ON THE ANCIENT WORLD VOLUME 24 | 2004

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<http://farms.byu.edu>

## Restoring the Original Text of the Book of Mormon

Elegantly produced and weighing in at 652 pages, the first part of volume 4 in Professor Royal Skousen's ongoing Book of Mormon critical text project has just come from the press. Volumes 1 and 2, containing transcripts of the original manuscript and the printer's manuscript of the Book of Mormon, were published by FARMS in 2001. Volume 3, which will describe the history of the Book of Mormon text from Joseph Smith's original dictation through the current standard editions, will appear after all parts of volume 4 have been published. Volume 3 will include a complete analysis of the grammatical editing of the Book of Mormon.

Entitled *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon*, this fourth volume considers every significant change that has occurred in the English Book of Mormon over the 175 years since Joseph Smith first dictated it to his scribes; it also considers a number of conjectured revisions for specific passages. It draws not only upon the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon and upon the printer's manuscript prepared by Oliver Cowdery and two other scribes but also upon 20 significant printed versions ranging from the 1830 edition to the current standard editions published by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the Community of Christ (formerly known as the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints). In certain cases, Professor Skousen, an internationally known professor of linguistics and English language at Brigham Young University who has directed the Book of Mormon critical text project for the past 16 years, carefully analyzes evidence from usage elsewhere in the Book of Mormon to assist in establishing the original reading. Moreover, where applicable, he marshals additional evidence of language usage from dialectal and earlier English, as well as data from the King James Bible and the original

biblical languages, Hebrew and Greek. His purpose throughout is, as precisely as human means permit, to recover the original English-language text of the Book of Mormon. Part 1 of volume 4 commences with the title page and the witness statements and then proceeds from 1 Nephi 1 through 2 Nephi 10. It thus represents approximately one-seventh of the Book of Mormon as we have it. Successive parts of volume 4

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## FARMS Review Offers Wide Coverage, Thoughtful Analysis

At nearly 500 pages, the latest issue of the FARMS Review (vol. 16, no. 1) continues its pattern of offering wide-ranging coverage and in-depth analysis aimed at encouraging reliable scholarship and helping readers make informed judgments about recent publications in the field of Mormon studies.

In the introduction, associate editor George L. Mitton notes the developing trend of "anti-Mormon writings deriving from the secular/agnostic/atheist wing rather than from sectarian sources" and the growing need to respond to those writings. He explains why, when evaluating publications critical of Mormonism, contributors to the *Review* consider not only the work itself but the author's past writings, preparation, and known prejudices and attitudes. From there Mitton reviews early attempts to discredit the Smith family (especially Joseph Jr.) and offers instructive correctives and comments.

Alan Goff responds to three essays in the controversial books *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon* and *American Apocrypha* that rely on the "Mosiah-first" theory of the Book of Mormon composition to support their claim that the book is of modern origin. These critics argue that after losing the 116 pages of manuscript, Joseph Smith wrote the books of Mosiah


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strates that Oliver Cowdery miscopied the original manuscript's *sword*, thus creating an inconsistent "wrinkle" in the text.

Other corrections include identifying the devil as the "proprietor" of hell at 1 Nephi 15:35, rather than as its "preparator," and changing the spelling of the name of a nonbiblical Old World prophet from *Zenock* to *Zenoch* (which, incidentally, is more acceptable as a Hebrew name).

An interesting case occurs at 2 Nephi 7:11, where the printer's manuscript has "behold all ye that *kindleth* fire." Professor Skousen argues persuasively that Oliver Cowdery misheard Joseph Smith's dictated "kindle a fire"—which, of course, sounds very similar—and notes it as evidence that the original manu-

script, for which this portion of the text is missing, was, just as Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery always said it was, orally dictated rather than copied.

Professor Skousen's critical text project is a landmark of meticulous, painstaking academic research, representing a high point in the history of Latter-day Saint scholarship. For decades, detractors of the Book of Mormon have pointed to textual changes in the book as evidence of its falsehood. Now, at a level of careful scholarship far beyond anything ever produced on this subject by any critic of the book, Royal Skousen has shown, without having set out to do so, that the text of the Book of Mormon is even more impressive than believers have previously recognized. 

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## *FARMS Review* cont. from p. 1

through Moroni and then wrote 1 and 2 Nephi last. The translation sequence is not in question, but the critics' application of it (which spares them the complex work of responsible textual analysis) is. For example, Goff refutes the idea that the Book of Mormon from Mosiah on shows no awareness of Nephi's prophecies of Christ's ministry in the New World because Joseph composed 1 and 2 Nephi last. He does this by demonstrating the integrity of the Book of Mormon's self-reference—its allusions to earlier passages that would have posed a major creative challenge had those subtleties been fabricated with nothing yet to allude to. Goff contends that "the evidence [for the Mosiah-first theory] ought to rely less on the ideological assumptions that there were no gold plates and that Joseph Smith composed a modern novel" and more on tools of textual analysis that revisionists conveniently ignore.

Daniel C. Peterson and Matthew Roper reveal Stan Larson's undersupported arguments regarding Thomas S. Ferguson's ventures in Book of Mormon archaeology. Ferguson was an amateur archaeologist who, critics claim, lost faith in the Book of Mormon after what they characterize as his expert research in the field. Larson's book on Ferguson, *Quest for the Gold Plates: Thomas Stuart Ferguson's Archaeological Search for the Book of Mormon*, is based on that claim. Peterson and Roper show the book to be flawed and inconclusive and its presentation of facts to be

incomplete. For example, Ferguson's family contests the statement that he lost his testimony of the Book of Mormon. Moreover, if it is true that his faith was undermined, it was due to his shallow research and not to a lack of evidence. The reviewers also discuss Larson's choice to ignore the qualified research of Ferguson's contemporaries, the lack of credible proof in Ferguson's own work, and recent extensive research on pre-Columbian Mesoamerica that shows Larson's claims to be largely founded on assumption.


In another review, M. Gerald Bradford appraises *From the Last Supper through the Resurrection*, a book edited by BYU religion professors Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Thomas A. Wayment. The book details new insights into key events of the last two days of the Savior's mortal ministry. Bradford notes the sometimes complex but always rewarding nature of the studies and then explains how the various contributors achieve a good representation of the diverse opinions on the subject matter while expressing their testimonies of the Savior. He concludes that this anthology will be valuable within and outside the Latter-day Saint faith because of its scholarship and unique perspective.

Two other reviews treat topics of unique interest. In his review of Gavin Menzies's book *1421, the Year China Discovered America*, John A. Tvedtnes outlines current evidence for an early Chinese presence in the Americas and explains how those findings might contribute to Book of Mormon research.

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## FARMS Review cont. from p. 7

Gaye Strathearn reviews Jeffrey A. Trumbower's *Rescue for the Dead: The Posthumous Salvation of Non-Christians in Early Christianity*, a volume from a non-Latter-day Saint writer documenting evidence of baptism and prayer for the dead in the early Christian church. Strathearn discusses and commends both Trumbower's research and his notes on the Latter-day Saint practices concerning salvation for the dead.

In addition to its 13 book reviews, this issue of the *Review* includes 6 essays of related interest, 15 book notes, the editor's rating of recent books, and an index to the 2003 issues. The freestanding essays deal with such topics as recent trends in Book of Mormon apologetics, secret combinations, and the New World Archaeological Foundation. To purchase a copy of the *FARMS Review*, use the enclosed mail-order form or visit the FARMS section (under "BYU Publications") of [byubookstore.com](http://byubookstore.com). 

### FORTHCOMING PUBLICATIONS

*Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* (vol. 13, nos. 1–2), edited by S. Kent Brown, is a special double issue devoted to the Hill Cumorah. Studies include the geologic history and archaeology of the area, early accounts of a cave in the hill, the Hill Cumorah Pageant (its history, music, and costuming), Latter-day Saint poetry, the Hill Cumorah Monument, a linguistic analysis of the name *Cumorah*, and the earliest photographs of the hill. Available late fall 2004.

*Apostles and Bishops in Early Christianity*, edited by John Hall and John W. Welch, represents an edited, expanded version of Hugh Nibley's lecture notes from a class he taught in 1954. This volume explores the offices of apostle and bishop, the priesthood authority associated with them, and questions of succession in the early church and in Rome. Copublished with Deseret Book, it will appear as volume 15 in the *Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*. Available late fall 2004.

*Astronomy, Papyrus, and Covenant*, edited by John Gee and Brian Hauglid, is the third volume in the *Book of Abraham Series*. It includes papers from a FARMS-sponsored conference on the Book of Abraham and covers such topics as Abraham's vision of the heavens, commonalities between the Book of Abraham and noncanonical ancient texts, and the significance of the Abrahamic covenant. Available early 2005.

### Forthcoming METI Publications

*Theodore Abu Qurrah*, translated and introduced by John C. Lamoreaux of Southern Methodist University, includes first-ever English translations of a substantial portion of Theodore Abu Qurrah's writings, which treat such issues as the characteristics of true religion and the nature of free will. Abu Qurrah (fl. AD 810), the bishop of Harran (in modern-day southern Turkey), was one of the first Christians to write in Arabic and to mount a sustained theological defense of Christianity against Islam. Available late 2004.

# Insights

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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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PO Box 7113, University Station, Provo, UT 84602  
1-800-327-6715 (or 801-422-9229)

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