



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

Volume 24 | Number 5

Article 2

January 2004

The Michigan Relics Revisited

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Recommended Citation

(2004) "The Michigan Relics Revisited," *Insights: The Newsletter of the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship*: Vol. 24: No. 5, Article 2.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/insights/vol24/iss5/2>

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Insights

A WINDOW ON THE ANCIENT WORLD VOLUME 24 | 2004

Number 5

<http://farms.byu.edu>

FARMS Book of Mormon Research Highlighted

During a recent meeting of the FARMS Development Council, four principal investigators on Book of Mormon-related projects reviewed the status of their ongoing work. The reports clarified each project's goals, highlighted new findings, noted future directions, and expressed appreciation for the crucial support of generous donors, many of whom were in attendance. A summary of the presentations follows.

Book of Mormon Critical Text Project

After opening remarks by FARMS director Noel B. Reynolds, Royal Skousen discussed the Book of Mormon critical text project. Begun in 1988, the project seeks to determine the original English-language text of the Book of Mormon as Joseph

Smith received and dictated it. Skousen, a BYU professor of linguistics and English language, said that textual evidence shows the original text to be more systematic than initially thought and that Joseph received the text word for word and letter by letter. Skousen illustrated what he termed the "astonishing consistency" of the original text with the following example from part 1 of volume 4 of the critical text. The current Book of Mormon text has 17 occurrences of the phrase *sins of the world*, but the only two that refer to John the Baptist's witness of Jesus (1 Nephi 10:10 and 2 Nephi 31:4) originally read in the singular (*sin of the world*), perfectly consistent with the reading of the biblical parallel in John 1:29. (For a full report on the recently published part 1 of volume 4, see the report "Restoring the Original Text of the Book of Mormon," *Insights* 24/4 [2004].)

[continued on page 6](#)

The Michigan Relics Revisited

One of the most enduring archaeological hoaxes, the Michigan relics, a series of copper, slate, and clay forgeries, were "discovered" throughout counties in Michigan from the late 19th century until 1920. James Scotford and Daniel Soper apparently worked together to create and sell the forgeries. Scholars and archaeologists were skeptical from the outset, but interest in the objects persisted. In 1911 James E. Talmage studied the relics, recognizing the impact they could have on the perception of the Book of Mormon if they were genuine. In a detailed report, Talmage dismissed them as blatant forgeries.

However, interest revived in 1984 when a series of authors began writing about the relics, attributing their engravings to Zoroastrian, Christian, and other Old World influences (see *JBMS* 7/1 [1998]: 78). The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints had acquired almost 800 such objects through a

donation from the University of Notre Dame. Richard Stamps, Latter-day Saint professor of archaeology at Oakland University, examined the collection in 1977 and again in 1998 and 1999. He likewise declared the relics to be forgeries (see his article "Tools Leave Marks: Material Analysis of the Scotford-Soper-Savage Michigan Relics," *BYU Studies* 40/3 [2001]; also see Mark Ashurst-McGee, "Mormonism's Encounter with the Michigan Relics," in that same issue of *BYU Studies*).

While the items clearly are not evidence of an ancient civilization, they are artifacts of Michigan's history. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints recently donated the collection to the Michigan Historical Museum in Lansing, where pieces were on display through August 2004. The exhibit, "Digging Up Controversy," included commentary depicting the objects as fraudulent but nevertheless reflective of earlier Michigan citizens' fixation with archaeology and ancient civilizations. 