



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

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Volume 23 | Number 5

Article 4

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January 2003

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### Recommended Citation

(2003) "Institute Researchers Share Findings at LDS Apologetics Conference," *Insights: The Newsletter of the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship*: Vol. 23: No. 5, Article 4.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/insights/vol23/iss5/4>

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## Institute Researchers Share Findings at LDS Apologetics Conference

Three Institute researchers were among the speakers at the fifth annual FAIR conference, held August 7–8 at Utah Valley State College, in Orem, Utah. Founded in 1997, the Foundation for Apologetic Information and Research is a nonprofit corporation dedicated to providing sound information and research that support the doctrine, beliefs, and practices of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, particularly on matters that are challenged by unbelievers.

“The purpose of FAIR is not to debate, argue, or contend with critics of our faith,” noted Scott Gordon, the organization’s president. “Our goal is to help members and investigators of the church deal with the issues that the critics raise.”

The Institute was well represented in the discussions of such issues at the conference. Matthew Roper, a resident scholar with the Institute, addressed the question of whether Latter-day Saint attitudes have recently taken a drastic shift regarding the origin of American Indians. Some critics have charged that church leaders and writers long thought Lehi and his descendants to be the sole ancestors of the Indians and that

such attitudes changed only in the face of recent archaeological and DNA studies.

Roper shared statements from church leaders and other knowledgeable Latter-day Saints throughout church history that support the idea that other peoples were already in the Americas when Lehi’s group arrived there. A First Presidency–approved statement from the 1950s, for instance, said that Book of Mormon peoples were “among” the ancestors of modern American Indians.

The Book of Mormon itself contains internal evidence for the existence of cultures contemporaneous with the Nephites and Lamanites. Jacob’s account of contention among his people, for example, may suggest that the Nephites had already joined with other groups or that Sherem was not a member of Lehi’s family, Roper said. Further, such phrases in the Book of Mormon as “the people of Nephi” and “the people who were now called Lamanites” suggest that Lehi’s family mingled with other populations already present in the area. Lehi himself declared that “the Lord hath covenanted this land unto me, and to my children forever, and also *all those who should be led out of other countries* by the hand of the Lord” (2 Nephi 1:5).

Taking up a related issue, senior resident scholar John Tvedtnes responded to charges of racism in the Book of Mormon. He pointed out


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## The Desert Libraries of Timbuktu

The Library of Congress and the Smithsonian Institution have opened an exhibit titled “Ancient Manuscripts from the Desert Libraries of Timbuktu,” the famous trading town at the edge of the Sahara Desert in Mali. The manuscripts include Qur’anic teachings, mathematics, physics, medicine, and astronomy.


But this may be just the tip of the iceberg. According to Abdelkader Haidara, executive director of Timbuktu’s Mamma Haidara Commemorative Library, there may be a million such manuscripts in the 22 private libraries of Timbuktu, most

of them held by descendants of the original owners. Looking beyond that city to the rest of Mali and to neighboring countries such as Mauritania, Niger, and Burkina Faso, Haidara estimates that there may be 100 libraries with five million manuscripts. Some of the manuscripts had been buried to protect them from the wars that ravaged the area prior to European colonization.

James H. Billington, Librarian of Congress, noting that medieval Arabic medicine was far ahead of European practices, suggested that some of these manuscripts might shed light on the history of diseases that originated in Africa, such as HIV and ebola. (See the article posted at <http://www.sciscoop.com/story/2003/6/26/7135/87226>.) 

## Gold Book continued from page 1

exhibited many marks of antiquity in its construction, and much skill in the art of engraving. (*History of the Church*, 4:537)

While the size and number of plates comprising the two documents differ, it is interesting that both sets of plates were of gold<sup>3</sup> and were held together by rings. (For a news report of the book, see <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/2939362.stml>.)  —contributed by John A. Tvedtnes

### Notes

1. For a discussion of Orphic gold plates buried with the dead, see C. Wilfred Griggs, “The Book of Mormon as an Ancient Book,” *BYU Studies* 22/3 (1982): 259–78; republished in Noel B. Reynolds, ed., *Book of Mormon*

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that Nephi made a clear distinction between the “curse” of the Lamanites (being cut off from the presence of the Lord by Nephi’s departure) and the “mark” of a “skin of blackness,” the latter being intended to keep the Nephites from mingling with the Lamanites and partaking of their wickedness (see 2 Nephi 5:1–7, 19–24; Alma 3: 14–16). Further, Jacob chastised his people for hating the Lamanites because of their skin color and warned that the Nephites could also be cursed because of unrighteousness (see Jacob 3).

The Nephites’ frequent attempts to convert the Lamanites shows that the Book of Mormon does not promote notions of racial inferiority. Tvedtnes also noted that, as an anthropologist, he does not use the term *race*, having concluded several years ago that it is an artificial construction.

Tvedtnes discussed Joseph Smith’s emendation of 2 Nephi 30:6. In this verse, the Nephites are promised that they will receive a knowledge of the Savior. They are also promised that “the scales of darkness shall fall from their eyes; and not many generations shall pass away among them, save they shall be a pure and delightful people.” Although this passage read “white and delightful” in the original manuscript, Joseph Smith changed the word *white* to *pure*, prob-

*Authorship: New Light on Ancient Origins* (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1982; reprinted by FARMS).

2. The Etruscan find makes it likely that the brass plates of Laban were also held together by rings, though the Book of Mormon is silent on that subject. These brass plates may have been what influenced Nephi and later Mormon to keep their records on metal plates.
3. It is likely that the plates used by Mormon for his abridgment of the Nephite records were gold alloyed with another metal, perhaps copper. As we have noted, Joseph Smith wrote to Wentworth that the plates had “the appearance of gold.” Similarly, the Eight Witnesses declared that the plates had “the appearance of gold; and as many of the leaves as the said Smith has translated we did handle with our hands; and we also saw the engravings thereon, all of which has the appearance of ancient work, and of curious workmanship” (Book of Mormon, Testimony of the Eight Witnesses).

ably to avoid the misinterpretation that skin color would literally change. In the Bible and other ancient texts, the term *white* is sometimes used in the sense of “pure” rather than of color.

Daniel C. Peterson, codirector of research for the Institute, noted that theism in general and Mormonism in particular have become popular targets in recent months. “There are people out there who see religion as the cause of violence, and this gives rise to a book like Jon Krakauer’s *Under the Banner of Heaven*,” he said. But while some see Krakauer’s book as an attack on the church, it actually attacks the very concept of religious faith itself, questioning whether rational individuals are justified in believing in a moral authority greater than themselves. Peterson went on to explain that given Krakauer’s hostility toward religion in general, religious people cannot fairly use the book to criticize the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (just as evangelical critics cannot fairly use DNA evidence to discount the Book of Mormon when the same DNA evidence shows that migrations to America took place more than 10,000 years ago, long before many evangelicals believe the earth was created).


Peterson noted that while millions of people were murdered in the 20th century at the hands of atheists, it would be simplistic to blame these atrocities on atheism. By the same token, evil acts committed by “religious” people must be viewed in their

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complexity, with proper recognition of the value of religious belief. Faith in God offers meaning and purpose to people around the world, especially to those who suffer from poverty or illness. Any fair-minded discussion of religion ought to acknowledge this, he said.

Other speakers and topics at the conference included the following: Roger R. Keller, professor of church history and doctrine, BYU, on “The Grace of Apologetics”; Armand L. Mauss, emeritus professor of sociology, Washington State University, on “The

Church, the Race Issue, and Misplaced Apologetics”; D. Jeffrey Meldrum, associate professor of anatomy and anthropology, Idaho State University, on “The Children of Lehi: DNA and the Book of Mormon”; and Michael D. Rhodes, associate research professor of ancient scripture, BYU, on “The Book of Abraham: Dealing with the Critics.”


The papers by Roper and Tvedtnes will appear in the forthcoming issue of the *FARMS Review* (vol. 15, no. 2).  —reported by Larry Morris and Mike Parker

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great worth of souls in mind (D&C 18:10), he said. Joseph learned the true extent of the Savior’s personal suffering upon receiving the revelation in D&C 19—the “final, indispensable lesson before he organized the church and the most significant lesson of the gospel,” Griffith said. He went on to note that lawyers, whose ideal role is to build communities based on the rule of law, are often “at the forefront of the push for riches,” which runs counter to the admonition in Jacob 2:18–19 and to the spirit of Moses 7:18 if that pursuit is not undertaken with the intent to bless others. Such purity of motive should be the mainspring of discipleship, he said.

### Herculaneum Papyri Project: Preliminary Findings

Dr. Gianluca Del Mastro, a professor of philosophy at the University of Naples and a visiting professor in BYU’s classics department, reviewed

progress on interpreting and electronically preserving the Herculaneum papyri using multispectral imaging techniques developed at BYU. Calling the MSI images a revolution in reading the carbonized papyri, he showed examples of how he has been able to discern scroll text that was previously unreadable. For example, the images have made it possible to read text in depressions of wrinkled fragments and to distinguish congealed layers of papyrus from one another and ink strokes from fibers. The images have also enabled scholars to identify individual scribes. One intriguing find was a reference to a previously unknown tragedy by Euripides. In March, Del Mastro matched two fragments from Philodemus’s “On Poems.” He said that the fragile papyri, which date from 1000 B.C., have deteriorated 10 percent in the past seven years but now are electronically preserved. Del Mastro concluded by noting the discovery in 2000 of seven papyri (15 fragments) from two houses in Herculaneum, one of which (Casa de Bicentenario) appears to have housed the first Christian community in the city. 

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priests, record keepers, architects, merchants, artists, and judges, who all seemed idle compared with the hardworking farmers who were the ideal (exemplified by King Benjamin, who “labored with [his] own hands,” Mosiah 2:14). Then there were the elite at the pinnacle of social, political, and economic power who demanded support. For example, King Noah taxed his Zeniffite subjects to provide sustenance

for the elite (see Mosiah 11:3–8; also Mosiah 7:22; Alma 60:21–22; 3 Nephi 6:10–12). But the economic system also supported a variety of respected craft workers, such as “curious workmen, who did work all kinds of ore and did refine it” (Helaman 6:11).

An economic surplus stimulated trade, and it made at least some people rich (see Mosiah 24:7; Helaman 3:10; 6:7–8). Furthermore, certain regions were more productive than others: central Zarahemla had to supply the Nephite army in the southwest quarter

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