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Latest Review Rolls off Press

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Insights

A WINDOW ON THE ANCIENT WORLD VOLUME 22 | 2002

Number 1

<http://farms.byu.edu>

Latest Review Rolls off Press

The *FARMS Review of Books* has a long tradition of providing its readers with insightful and substantive reviews of books on the Book of Mormon, Mormon studies, and Christian studies, as well as those books that attack the beliefs of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The latest issue does not disappoint. It contains reviews and responses to 18 books or articles on diverse topics, such as ancient Nephite culture, the conversion of Alma, hidden ancient records, the temple, the LDS concept of the nature of God, and the ark of the covenant.

In one review Brant A. Gardner observes that John L. Sorenson's 1997 book *Nephite Culture and Society: Selected Papers*, though lacking the kind of detailed analysis of historical setting found in his 1985 "watershed book," *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, "provides some in-depth views of themes that were not as extensively treated

in [the earlier book]." He notes further that Sorenson's substantive approach and overall vision of how the pieces of Nephite culture fit together inform the essays, allowing readers to better understand the Book of Mormon.

Gardner provides a synopsis and critical discussion of each essay and concludes by focusing on the book's final essay, "The Political Economy of the Nephites," which he considers sufficient reason to purchase the book. Gardner explains that "this topic clearly underscores the radically different conceptual structures that govern Book of Mormon events." He praises Sorenson for opening up "new vistas of understanding," though he believes the author should have relaxed "his self-imposed restriction of examining only the text without seeking links to the outside world."

In another review Alonzo Gaskill responds to an unpublished document of limited circulation that defends the Catholic Church's recent pronouncement that baptisms performed by the Church of Jesus Christ

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Researchers Share, Test Ideas with Peers

Each semester the Institute sponsors an average of six brown bag presentations (so named because they are informal lectures delivered during the noon hour). Held on the BYU campus, these events are conducted largely for the benefit of scholars and other specialists who are invited to report on research projects they are pursuing and papers they are writing. At the conclusion of their presentations, the speakers respond to questions and constructive comments from the audience. These events enable researchers to test and explore the ideas and insights they are developing on a host of topics related to the work of the Institute. In order to ensure a maximum amount of give-and-take between the presenters and the audience, attendance

is limited to invited BYU faculty and staff as well as Institute personnel.

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later reports on most of these presentations. Three such reports follow.

in this issue

- Book of Mormon Word Usage
- Update: The Theban Legion

Strength of LDS Theology

On 7 November 2001 Barry Bickmore, assistant professor of geology at BYU, addressed the topic "Doctrinal Trends in Early Christianity and the Strength of the Mormon Position." He began by noting three versions of Christian history since New Testament times: (1) direct continuity with the New Testament Church, the Catholic and Orthodox view; (2) some


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and Research. The full text of his brown bag presentation can be found online at www.fair-lds.org.

Herculaneum Papyri Project

On 28 November 2001 Roger T. Macfarlane, chair of the Department of Humanities, Classics, and Comparative Literature at BYU, reported on the Herculaneum papyri project, for which he is the principal investigator. He began by showing a video clip in which noted scholars praise BYU's recent work of digitally imaging the ancient carbonized texts to improve legibility and to create an electronic archive that will preserve the images and facilitate scholarly access to them. The Villa of the Papyri, destroyed in A.D. 79 following the eruption of Vesuvius, was first excavated in 1752–53. Many of the scrolls and scroll fragments found in the villa's library contain the writings of Philodemus, a Greek Epicurean philosopher of the third century B.C. One level of the library is yet unexcavated, and scholars expect to find more works by important Greek and Latin authors, Macfarlane said. After discussing plans to publish the images and to publicize the extraordinary find through museum exhibitions and television, he concluded by showing specifically how the digital images—in his words “a revolutionary step forward in the reading and publication of the Herculaneum papyri”—are aiding scholars.

The Origin of the Book of Mormon

On 12 December, Louis C. Midgley, emeritus professor of political science at Brigham Young University, and Matthew P. Roper, resident scholar at the Institute, reviewed their progress on a book project titled *Recovery of the Book of Mormon: A FARMS Sourcebook of Historical Documents*. Midgley and Roper's goal for the project is to update and replace Francis W. Kirkham's groundbreaking collection, *A New Witness for Christ in America*, which has been the main resource for researchers of the early history of the Book of Mormon since it was published in 1937. *Recovery of the Book of Mormon* will include 575 printed sources (newspaper articles, books, pamphlets, and tracts, ranging in length from one sentence to over 300 pages) from the lifetime of Joseph Smith that deal with the origin of the Book of Mormon. Although most of the sources were written by anti-Mormons, this collection will be valuable for many reasons, including (1) some of the sources record information about the missionaries, members, and teachings of the early church that is not available in other sources; (2) the sources show the earliest forms of various arguments against the Book of Mormon; (3) many of the sources that will be printed in their entirety through this project are currently available only in archives. Midgley and Roper are hoping to begin publishing the results of this project in 2003. 

Review of Books continued from page 1

of Latter-day Saints are not valid. The author, Father Luis Ladaria, cites doctrinal differences between the two faiths as key to the ruling. Gaskill challenges Ladaria's arguments involving such issues as the Trinity, the purpose of baptism, and authority and finds them scripturally unsustainable, contradictory, and self-defeating.

Gaskill notes that the Catholic Church, which rejects LDS baptism partly because LDS beliefs contradict the Catholic conception of the Trinity (“one God existing within three persons of one substance”), does not apply that standard to baptism in other Christian faiths. For example, the Eastern


Orthodox notion of the Godhead, like the LDS view, is essentially “subordinationist” and therefore in harmony with the views of early Christian fathers whom the Catholic Church accepts as orthodox. Yet LDS baptism is rejected while Eastern Orthodox baptism is not. Gaskill identifies other “false dichotomies” in Ladaria's reasoning but acknowledges that the ruling itself is inoffensive and fair, since the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints baptizes its Catholic converts.

Kurt Widmer's book *Mormonism and the Nature of God: A Theological Evolution, 1830–1915* prompted a review and response by David L. Paulsen. In his book Widmer claims that the Latter-day Saint concept of the nature of God evolved during the lifetime of Joseph Smith from modalism

(the idea that the Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost are different modes of the same being) to binitarianism (a belief in the Father and Son as separate beings, but a denial of the divinity of the Holy Ghost) and finally to cosmic henotheism (the idea that many gods exist, but only the one God is worshipped). Widmer also claims that LDS theology remained unclear until the early 1900s, when LDS General Authorities James E. Talmage, John A. Widstoe, and B. H. Roberts clarified and defined the nature of God.

In his review Paulsen responds to Widmer's claims by quoting the scriptures and the writings of Joseph Smith and other early church leaders. While he admits that the early LDS concept of God grew and changed as Joseph Smith received knowledge "line upon line, precept upon precept" (2 Nephi 28:30), Paulsen shows that the Book of Mormon, the Book of Moses, the Book of Abraham, and the Doctrine and Covenants consistently point to a Godhead of three beings who are unified in purpose and action.

This issue also includes reviews of *Come unto Christ: The Conversion of Alma the Younger*, by Merrill Jenson and Betsy Jenson; *The Book of Mormon and Other Hidden Books*, by John A. Tvedtnes; *Charting the Book of Mormon*, by John W. Welch and J. Gregory Welch; *A Guide to the Joseph Smith Papyri*, by John Gee; *The Temple in Time and Eternity*, edited by Donald W. Parry and Stephen D. Ricks; and many others, as well as responses to several articles and books written by detractors of the church. Reviewers include Barry R. Bickmore, Brant A. Gardner, William J. Hamblin, Hugh W. Nibley, John A. Tvedtnes, and John W. Welch. The *Review* also includes a bibliography of books on the Book of Mormon published in 2000.

To purchase the *Review*, see the enclosed order form or visit the catalog section of the FARMS Web site. 

FORTHCOMING PUBLICATIONS

The Hôr Book of Breathings: A Translation and Commentary, by Michael D. Rhodes, treats the fragments of the Joseph Smith Papyri associated with Facsimiles 1 and 3 of the Book of Abraham. Available in March 2002.

Susanna: Text, Translations, and Commentary, edited by Mark Sedgwick, includes the Greek, Latin, and English texts of the apocryphal book of Susanna. Available in March 2002.

A Thematic Bibliography of Ancient Maya Writing, compiled by Stephen D. Houston and Zachary Nelson, presents over 200 pages of sources about the Ancient Maya.

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and Mormon Studies (FARMS)**

**Institute for the Study and
Preservation of Ancient Religious Texts**
Brigham Young University

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FARMS is a research arm 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.

It is hoped that this information will help all interested people to "come unto Christ" (Jacob 1:7) and to understand and appreciate more fully the scriptural witnesses of the divine mission of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

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