



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

Volume 22 | Number 2

Article 2

January 2002

LDS Scholars Embrace Historicity of Scripture

David E. Bokovoy

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/insights>



Part of the [Mormon Studies Commons](#), and the [Religious Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Bokovoy, David E. (2002) "LDS Scholars Embrace Historicity of Scripture," *Insights: The Newsletter of the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship*: Vol. 22: No. 2, Article 2.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/insights/vol22/iss2/2>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Insights: The Newsletter of the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.



Insights

A WINDOW ON THE ANCIENT WORLD VOLUME 22 | 2002

Number 2

<http://farms.byu.edu>

Symposium Reports Research on Abraham Traditions

A FARMS symposium at BYU on Saturday, 26 January, highlighted findings from a years-long effort to collect, translate, and publish ancient accounts of the early life of the patriarch Abraham. Titled “Traditions about the Early Life of Abraham,” the free public event featured presentations by John Tvedtnes, Brian Hauglid, and John Gee, compilers and editors of a new book of the same title published by the Institute under the FARMS imprint.

Participants filled the Harold B. Lee Library auditorium and three overflow rooms to capacity, and hundreds more viewed the proceedings live via the Internet. Sponsored by the Institute and BYU’s Religious Studies Center, the three-hour symposium began with opening remarks by Institute executive director Daniel Oswald and associate director M. Gerald Bradford.

In the first presentation, “The Abraham Traditions Project,” Hauglid, an assistant professor of ancient scripture at BYU, pointed out Abraham’s pivotal place in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, as well as in LDS theology. He and his colleagues found many important parallels between ancient Abraham narratives from diverse traditions and the Book of Abraham. Hauglid outlined three main purposes of the project: (1) to seek traces of divine revelation in the Abraham traditions, (2) to further Hugh Nibley’s research in this field, and (3) to make the largely inaccessible corpus of Abraham material available in English translation.

Hauglid noted that of the more than 45 nonbiblical motifs identified in the Book of Abraham, all are attested to one degree or another among the 119 traditions collected in *Traditions about the Early Life of Abraham*. He sees the book as providing overwhelming support for the claim that the Book of Abraham is an ancient text. *Traditions* also opens up many

[continued on page 4](#)

LDS Scholars Embrace Historicity of Scripture

In defense of the historicity—the historical actuality—of scriptures embraced by Latter-day Saints, several BYU and Institute scholars have contributed to a collection of essays published recently by BYU’s Religious Studies Center. Edited by Paul Y. Hoskisson, *Historicity and the Latter-day Saint Scriptures* contains 11 essays that explore this topic.

From Elder Alexander B. Morrison’s discussion of the open canon of LDS scripture and the checks and balances on it, to Elder Dallin H. Oaks’s defense of faith and revelation as important elements of scriptural scholarship, the essays are helpful contributions

to the understanding of historicity in scripture. Essays by BYU religion professors Paul Y. Hoskisson, Kent P. Jackson, Robert J. Matthews, and Robert L. Millet deal with scholastic developments that have led some to question the historicity of scripture, offer cogent reasons why the scriptures must be historically authentic if they are to be believed at all, and explain the necessity of historicity in both the justice of the gospel plan and the spiritual development of individual believers.

Two essays augment the idea of historicity. John S. Tanner advocates reading the scriptures as texts with meanings that may be literal, literary, or both, while James E. Faulconer’s complex but rewarding exploration of a premodern view of religious history directs attention away from the usual understanding of

[continued on page 3](#)

3. As cited in James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton University Press, 1969), 537, 538.
4. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy*, 81.
5. William L. Moran, "The Ancient Near Eastern Background of the Love of God in Deuteronomy," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 25 (1963): 77–87.
6. N. Lohfink, "Hate and Love in Osee 9, 15," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 25 (1963): 417.
7. This would explain why the Lord says that he loves Jacob (Israel) but hates his brother Esau (Malachi 1:2–3; Romans 9:13).

By David E. Bokovoy

THE LOOK OF AMERINDIANS

Lure of the West, the Smithsonian American Art Museum exhibit now showing at BYU's Museum of Art, includes a painting that may be of special interest to FARMS patrons. *Young Omaha, War Eagle, Little Missouri and Pawnees*, by Charles Bird King in 1821, depicts five American Indian chiefs. James D. Horan, writing in *The McKenney-Hall Portrait Gallery of American Indians* (New York: Bramhall House, 1982), observed that the King painting was one of a large



Charles Bird King, *Young Omaha, War Eagle, Little Missouri and Pawnees* (1821), Smithsonian American Art Museum

series of paintings commissioned by the U.S. government in the 1820s. Horan's album reproduces most of them and

sets their context. These portraits of Amerindian leaders of the eastern, southern, and plains states were painted while they visited Washington, D.C.

Horan notes that this art depicts faces far different from the "Mongoloid" norm assumed or pictured in most textbooks as representing "American Indians." For example, Horan refers to "McIntosh, the handsome Creek who looked like a swarthy-skinned Scots Highland Chief" (p. 122). Other notable examples of European-looking Amerindians (many of them Creeks or Shawnee) can be seen on pages 140, 160, 272, and 318. Today's experts on the Native Americans still have no answer to how such close resemblances to Europeans are to be accounted for. Whether the answer lies in the Book or Mormon or elsewhere, at least the problem suggests that conventional arguments that no voyagers crossed the ocean from the Old to the New World need rethinking. The free exhibit will continue at the Museum of Art until 18 May.

Historicity continued from page 1

historicity and toward the underlying order embodied in scriptural accounts.

John Gee and Stephen D. Ricks focus on historical plausibility as a method for determining historicity, disclosing both the strengths and weaknesses of this methodology. They show that the Book of Abraham is plausible in terms of what we know about its genre, specificity of concrete detail, particulars of government, social organization, and religious custom.

As Louis Midgley explains in his essay, critics of the Book of Mormon have tried to find a middle ground between deliberate fraud and divine authen-

ticity to justify its coming into being. But those who approach the study of the Book of Mormon from a naturalistic viewpoint have already imposed upon it the conclusion they hope to reach. Daniel C. Peterson presents a straightforward and entertaining discussion of the difference between historicity and inerrancy.

Historicity and the Latter-day Saint Scriptures is a thoughtful examination of an important issue for Latter-day Saints and people of faith everywhere. The collective force of this volume comes from its variety of engaging academic perspectives, showing that the historicity of the LDS scriptural canon is vital to the spiritual purposes behind them. To obtain a copy, see the enclosed order form or visit the catalog section of our Web site. 