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New Resource on Ancient Maya Writing Released

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Insights

A WINDOW ON THE ANCIENT WORLD VOLUME 22 | 2002

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New Resource on Ancient Maya Writing Released

A new volume published under the Institute's Research Press imprint is *A Thematic Bibliography of Ancient Maya Writing*, by Stephen D. Houston and Zachary Nelson. "Many people don't know about the quantity of research on ancient Maya writing," says Houston, a BYU professor of anthropology who is an authority on Maya writing. "In fact, the literature is overwhelmingly large. This bibliography provides a roadmap through that literature."

The bibliography arranges hundreds of publications into nine sections. The section titled "Discovery" lists publications that report on the first eyewitnesses who saw Maya writing in use and discussed the script with native scribes. Because of pressure from Spanish authorities, these scribes soon went out of business, in some cases possibly transferring their literacy to roman script. "Nature of Maya Writing" lists works dealing with the pivotal question of how

scholars have understood the writing system and what its components or spelling rules might have been. "History" relates to the first glimmerings and eventual triumphant discovery that Maya inscriptions contained historical records structured according to Maya needs and dynastic glorification.

Publications grouped under "Time" discuss the Maya practice of placing events in a temporal and astronomical context. For a long period the only understood portion of the Maya texts was time, and the associated numbers proved more amenable to analysis than the other portions of the glyphic texts (whose content has been revealed only in the last two decades). The section on "Supernaturals" relates to the presence of god names in the Maya "screenfold" books. Works in the "Objects" section treat a principal preoccupation of Maya texts: the dedication and possession of sacred objects and valuables, which the Maya "name-tagged" (denoted ownership) by means of hieroglyphic texts. These objects include chocolate vessels with text reporting ownership and even the

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Latest Occasional Papers Highlights Biblical Scholar

A new publication from the Institute highlights the biblical research of a prominent British scholar. Kevin Christensen's "Paradigms Regained: A Survey of Margaret Barker's Scholarship and Its Significance for Mormon Studies," the second issue of the *FARMS Occasional Papers*, compares the works of Margaret Barker with the writings of many Latter-day Saint researchers, including Hugh W. Nibley, Daniel C. Peterson, and John W. Welch.

Christensen begins with a short biography of Barker, a Cambridge-educated math and religion teacher, Methodist preacher, and member (and

recent past president) of the Society for Old Testament Study. Barker has published seven books and several journal articles, all of which are gaining increasing attention among LDS scholars because of the author's prodigious scholarship, profound insight, and, to use Christensen's words, "overall paradigm [that] burst[s] with information and insight of peculiar interest to Mormons."


Christensen goes on to examine the main themes of Barker's works. One theme that resonates with LDS readers is her idea of an "older testament"—a theory that before about 600 B.C. the Israelite religion had elements that were later lost or removed from the Old Testament. Many of those early elements align with ideas and theologies in the Book of Mormon

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recipes of particular decoctions. Other sections in the bibliography are “Principles of Decipherment,” “Mayan Languages and People,” and “Sites.”

According to Houston, the bibliography is a companion piece to *The Decipherment of Ancient Maya Writing*, which he recently published with Oswaldo Chinchilla and David Stuart. “Together,” says Houston, “these works should provide scholars with a key resource for understanding the great intellectual adventure of glyphic decoding.”

To obtain a copy of *A Thematic Bibliography of Ancient Maya Writing*, see the enclosed order form or visit the catalog section of the FARMS Web site. 

Occasional Papers continued from page 1

concerning divine visions, the prominent role of temples, and characteristics of the Messiah.

Throughout the paper, Christensen compares Barker’s works with the writings of LDS scholars. He devotes an entire chapter to showing how the Savior’s visit to the Nephites in 3 Nephi 8–28 fits perfectly with the ancient Israelite beliefs about the roles of the high priest, as well as with the Israelites’ Messianic expectations.

Christensen ends his paper with a challenge to researchers to examine Barker’s works. He suggests topics that could be rich sources of insight into the Old Testament and the Book of Mormon. To fully appreciate the scriptures, Christensen argues, a reader must challenge his or her own assumptions and be willing to accept new ideas, such as those found in the works of Margaret Barker.

To obtain a copy of *FARMS Occasional Papers 2*, see the enclosed order form or visit the catalog section of the FARMS Web site. 

UPCOMING EVENT

Saturday, 23 March 2002 “The World of Abraham,” a FARMS conference on the Book of Abraham, BYU Tanner Building, room 151, 9:00 A.M.–1:00 P.M. Admission is free.

FORTHCOMING PUBLICATION

Susanna: Texts, Translations, and Technical Notes, edited by Mark A. Sedgwick, includes the Greek, Latin, and English texts of the apocryphal book of Susanna. This third monograph in the Ancient Texts and Mormon Studies series is available in April 2002.

Insights

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A Publication of the
**Foundation for Ancient Research
and Mormon Studies (FARMS)**

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

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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.

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.

For more information or to order publications, contact us at
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