



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

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# Insights

A WINDOW ON THE ANCIENT WORLD VOLUME 22 | 2002

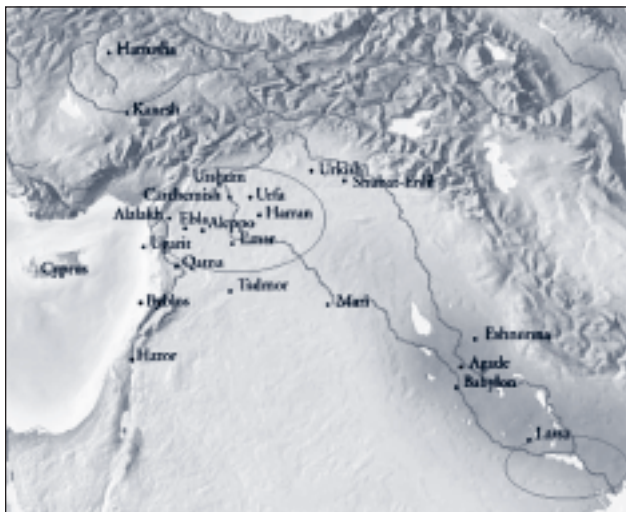
Number 4

<http://farms.byu.edu>

## World of Abraham Topic of FARMS Conference

Continuing a series of conferences on the Book of Abraham, the Institute sponsored “The World of Abraham,” a free public event at Brigham Young University on 23 March featuring new research that further illuminates the geographical and cultural horizons of the Book of Abraham. Institute executive director Daniel Oswald greeted a crowd of 350 people in the Tanner Building auditorium and dozens more in an overflow room. Many others viewed the event via delayed Web transmission a few hours later.

After remarks and introductions by associate executive director M. Gerald Bradford, BYU scholar Brian Hauglid, coeditor of FARMS’s Studies in the Book of Abraham series, gave an overview of the world of Abraham. He discussed the time period when Abraham lived (most scholars give a date of 2000–1500 B.C.E., the middle bronze age); the idolatry



Evidence presented at the conference favored the location of Abraham’s “Ur of the Chaldees” in northern Syria/southern Turkey rather than in southern Mesopotamia, the usual view (see the circled areas). Map by John Gee.

of Abraham’s day (Genesis is silent on this, but the Book of Abraham and numerous ancient traditions indicate that idolatry was rampant at that time); the cultural and religious influences of Mesopotamia, Canaan, and Egypt; and the concrete, dialectic nature of ancient Hebrew thought.

The first session, chaired by Kent Jackson, professor of ancient scripture at BYU, dealt with geography. Institute senior resident scholar John Tvedtnes reviewed the considerable evidence for placing Ur of the Chaldees near Harran (in southern Turkey), farther north than the usual view. His evidence is based on such things as personal names in Abraham’s family that correspond to place-names near Harran, patriarchal customs such as adoption and inheritance, and early traditions and writings about

Ur. Locating Ur in northern Syria or southern Turkey is important, he said, because that location fits the description of Abraham’s homeland as found in the Book of Abraham.

Kerry Muhlestein, a graduate student in Near Eastern languages and culture at UCLA, addressed the question of whether Facsimile 3 in the Book of Abraham fits into a historical context that supports the unique story of how Abraham came to teach Pharaoh in his court. Muhlestein noted archaeological evidence dating to Egypt’s Middle Kingdom period (time of Abraham) for (1) Egyptian influence at Megiddo, Byblos, Ebla, and many other sites in the Levant (Syria-Palestine area); (2) a mixed presence in the Sinai Peninsula; and (3) Asiatic presence in Egypt. He concluded that the significant degree of

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- Brown Bag Report

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analyze art, ritual, architecture, symbolism, literature, and other topics related to ancient temples. Hamblin gave a preview of the Web site, which features dozens of high-quality images and will eventually include site plans, maps, time lines, artifacts, primary texts, analyses, virtual tours, bibliographic material, a search engine, and links of interest. Val Brinkerhoff of BYU's visual arts department discussed his role in photographing elaborate temple complexes throughout Southeast Asia, and illustrator Michael Lyon discussed the durability of sacred motifs in Asia and the usefulness of 3-D modeling. Lyon then gave participants a virtual tour of Solomon's temple, a work in progress created by BYU computer animation students. 📺



The new Ancient Temples Initiative Web site will feature images, site plans, maps, time lines, virtual tours, and many other important tools for the study of ancient temples from around the world. It can be found at [ancienttemples.org](http://ancienttemples.org).

## Abraham continued from page 1

intellectual exchange between Egypt and the Semitic Levant shows Facsimile 3 to be consistent with that international setting.

John Gee, assistant research professor of Egyptology at the Institute, discussed how the geographic “horizons” (the area of contact of a given political entity at a given time) in Abraham’s day provide information for narrowing the time period in which he lived. Textual references and archaeological remains are evidence of such contact, Gee said. His research along these lines has enabled him to posit narrowed dates for Abraham’s travels: in (northern) Ur sometime between 1860 and 1810 B.C., in Harran after 1800 B.C., and in Egypt before 1775 B.C.

S. Kent Brown, a professor of ancient scripture at BYU and director of the Ancient Studies Program, chaired the second session of the conference, which dealt with cultural aspects of Abraham’s world. BYU associate research professor Michael Rhodes discussed the eternal nature of the family in Egyptian belief, as evidenced in funerary statues, tomb paintings, coffin texts, letters to the dead, and

the Book of the Dead. The literary, inscriptional, and artistic evidence indicates strong belief in the continuation of the family structure in the afterlife and emphasizes the joy and deification of those who are moral and righteous, Rhodes concluded.

Thomas Wayment, an assistant professor of ancient scripture at BYU, reviewed evidence from Greek and Roman sources (e.g., the writings of Euripides, Aeschylus, Plutarch, and Eusebius) indicating that human sacrifice—including the slaying and offering up of a beloved son as a ransom for military success—persisted in ancient Near Eastern culture at least since Canaanite times. The practice may reflect an archetypal belief in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ that was subsequently altered, he said.

In the final presentation of the conference, Terrence Szink, an instructor in ancient scripture at BYU, showed that God’s covenant with Abraham resembled an ancient simile oath. This oath made in the name of God and accompanied by a ritual ceremony (such as the slaughter of an animal) was self-execrative in nature, the violator of the oath suffering a stipulated penalty, such as death in the manner of the sacrificed animal (see Genesis 15; compare Jeremiah 34:18–20). Szink noted examples

of simile oaths in the Old Testament (Ruth 1:16–17) and the Book of Mormon (Alma 46:21–22) and concluded by relating these oaths to the sacramental covenant (see Exodus 24:3–8; Matthew 26:26–28; D&C 19:16–17).

Concluding the conference, Brian Hauglid highlighted the key contributions of each presentation and pronounced the event a success. The proceedings of this conference, as well as those of past and future Institute-sponsored conferences on the Book of Abraham, are expected to be published in book form by FARMS. Notices of these publication efforts will appear in *Insights*. ❏

**Video coverage of the recent FARMS Book of Abraham Conference “The World of Abraham” will be available for viewing on the FARMS Web site at [farms.byu.edu](http://farms.byu.edu) until 10 June 2002.**

**A broadband Internet connection is recommended.**

#### FROM OTHER PUBLISHERS

***Understanding Islam: An LDS Perspective***, a new audio-tape from Covenant Recordings in which Daniel C. Peterson, a BYU scholar of Islam and Arabic, provides a fascinating look at the history and beliefs of a religion of more than 1.4 billion adherents. See the order form.

***BYU Studies*, vol. 40, no. 4 (2001)**, a special issue two years in the making, is just off the press. In it LDS scholars engage various dimensions of Islamic thought. Topics include a history of Islam, the Qurʾān, Islamic art and architecture, the holy city of Jerusalem, and notable similarities between Islam and Mormonism. See the order form.

#### FORTHCOMING PUBLICATION

***The Hor 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. Featured at the sales display accompanying FARMS’s recent “World of Abraham” conference, a mock-up of this long-awaited book drew a lot of interest, in part because of its use of hieroglyphs that were custom designed for the project. Available in June 2002.

# Insights

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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 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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