



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

Volume 22 | Number 4

Article 3

January 2002

Brown Bag Report

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Recommended Citation

(2002) "Brown Bag Report," *Insights: The Newsletter of the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship*: Vol. 22: No. 4, Article 3.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/insights/vol22/iss4/3>

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Brown Bag Report

Each semester the Institute sponsors a series of brown bag presentations. These lectures give researchers the opportunity to present their latest findings to their peers in related fields and to receive constructive comment. Reports of four recent lectures follow.

Eastern Christian Studies at BYU

On 16 January Kristian Heal, resident scholar at the Institute, reviewed the past, present, and future of Eastern Christian studies at BYU. Heal is the directing editor of the Institute's Eastern Christian Texts publication series and also oversees the Eastern Christian Digital Preservation Initiative. He began his lecture by reviewing the work of the pioneers of Eastern Christian studies at BYU, Sidney B. Sperry and Hugh W. Nibley, both of whom studied and taught Semitic languages and Syriac. Their donations of books to the Harold B. Lee Library provided the basis for an extensive Syriac collection. The next generation of Eastern Christian scholars, including C. Wilfred Griggs and S. Kent Brown, delved into Coptic studies. Brown's monumental project to microfilm Coptic manuscripts laid the foundation for the Institute's efforts to digitize Eastern Christian manuscripts. Heal concluded that the goal of Eastern Christian studies is to make these important manuscripts available in digital form and to produce critical texts, editions, and translations to benefit scholars throughout the world.

Understanding Biblical Genealogies

On 31 January Professor Aaron Demsky of Bar-Ilan University in Israel, a specialist in biblical history and Hebrew language and epigraphy, addressed the topic "The First Families of Manasseh: Understanding Biblical Genealogies." He discussed how principles of historical geography and social anthropology can help "break the code" of puzzling biblical genealogies. An example is 1 Chronicles 7:14–19, a "segmented" genealogy that records geographical separation within the family

clan. This genealogy traces Manasseh's lineage west of the Jordan River through his Israelite wife as well as his lineage east of the Jordan through his Aramaean concubine. Demsky noted that a basic function of biblical genealogies was to undergird and preserve the "social contract"—clan relationships and obligations concerning matters of marriage, inheritance, and welfare that were based on tribal structure. Before they became fixed in literary form in the Bible, these genealogies were adjusted to equalize lineage status in response to social need, for example, when a certain line was destroyed or no sons were born to it, potentially leaving legal rights and social obligations in question.

Augustine and the Corporeality of God

On 13 March Carl Griffin, resident scholar at the Institute, reported on a paper he recently published with David Paulsen in *Harvard Theological Review*, titled "Augustine and the Corporeality of God." Griffin began with a history of the paper. In 1990 Paulsen published a paper in the same journal arguing that the writings of Origen and Augustine show that early Christians may have believed in a corporeal, anthropomorphic God. Three years later a published response to Paulsen's paper claimed that Augustine's writings do not support that view. Paulsen then hired Griffin as a research assistant, and together they wrote a meticulously researched counterresponse.

Griffin then touched on the major arguments of their paper. He said that although Augustine, the fifth-century bishop of Hippo, did not believe in a corporeal God, his letters show that the common Christians of his time did. Griffin argued that a careful look at Augustine's subtle writings reveals more than sufficient evidence to show an early Christian belief in an anthropomorphic God.

Ancient Temples Initiative

On 20 March William J. Hamblin, associate professor of history at BYU, reported on the Institute's Ancient Temples Initiative. As director of this effort, Hamblin is involved in developing a comprehensive database on ancient temples that will be available on the Web. The database will identify major sacred sites worldwide and will

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.

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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