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Foundation for Ancient Research & Mormon Studies

P O. Box 7113 Univ. Station, Provo, UT 84602

Newsletter

The Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies is a non-profit research and educational organization dedicated to the study of ancient Scripture. Your tax deductible contributions enable FARMS to sponsor and coordinate a wide range of research projects that enhance our understanding of these sacred writings.

APRIL 1982

FARMS NEWS

ANNOUNCING: THE BOOK OF MORMON ENCYCLOPEDIA.

After a year of planning, FARMS announces the beginning of a very long, very tough, and very exciting project: the production of a Book of Mormon Encyclopedia.

As President Jack Welch and his group see the project, this multi-volume work would assemble in a standard format the best scholarship available on the contents, history, and background of the Book of Mormon. "So many good studies have been undertaken on Book of Mormon subjects," Jack says, "the time is right for them to be brought together and made available to all."

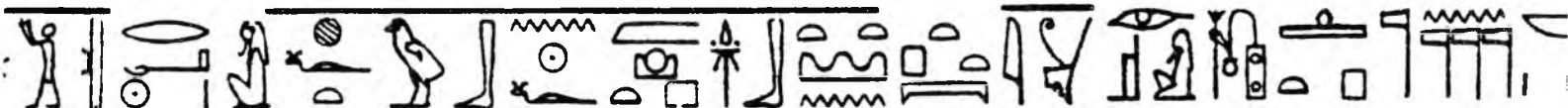
The Encyclopedia aims at including every significant aspect of the Book of Mormon and the lives of its peoples. Entries "would cover to the extent possible every person and place, every name, New and Old World history, archeology, culture, architecture, legal systems, philology, writing styles, literature, political institutions, warfare, family and tribal organization, and religion, as well as the modern translation, publication, study, and use of the Book of Mormon." FARMS role will be to act as a catalyst in bringing this all together.

It will be designed both for use in home and public libraries and as a comprehensive research tool for the scholar, and will include maps, graphs, photographs, bibliographies, and other aids. It will not be a doctrinal commentary.

FARMS is beginning the project immediately with a Concept Board that will produce an alphabetical list of desired topics, prepare a syllabus on each subject, and recommend possible authors, technical aids needed, and reviewers. This topic outline should be ready by the fall of 1982.

Scholars will be invited to prepare articles on specific topics which will then go through a review and editing process. These first articles will begin to appear in looseleaf format late in 1983 or early in 1984. John Sorenson explains that this format offers the tremendous advantage of flexibility so that information can be shared with readers as soon as it is ready, rather than having to wait for its turn in the alphabet to come. The final bound library edition will appear in 1989.

But all this cannot happen without organized support: we hope you will want to help. A great need is financial. This project will cost an estimated million dollars--and that's probably conservative. The more support received, the quicker and more



thoroughly the Encyclopedia can be completed. Tax deductible donations or pledges may be made to FARMS at Box 7113, University Station, Provo, Utah 84602, and are welcome in any amounts from individuals, families, foundations, corporations, or other organizations. Indications of long-range support are needed too.

A second need is for volunteers. If you have scholarly skills, technical abilities, research capabilities or simply typing time or other interests, please write to the same address and indicate what area you might like to work on. Please include a brief description of your background, skills, and degrees. Let us know what you think.

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

We hope you enjoy this latest Newsletter. We are excited about progress being made and hope you find the reports in this issue informative.

Our staff continues to be overwhelmed with your hundreds of requests for reprints, reports, and materials. Several thousand items have already been mailed. If you have experienced any trouble receiving yours, please let us know. We are here to be of help.

For some of you, this is your fourth Newsletter. Under FARMS' policy, unless you have contacted FARMS to contribute money or research, order materials, or submit names to get others involved, you will be screened out. We are not anxious to lose anyone interested in the Foundation's aims of promoting responsible Book of Mormon scholarship--so let us hear from you.

The new Reprints and Preliminary Reports offered with this Newsletter are listed on the Order Form. Back issues are also available on request.

Thanks to everyone who has been so supportive. With your help and continued interest some great things can happen!

PROJECT UPDATES

Critical Book of Mormon Text

A critical edition of the Book of Mormon may be a reality within a few months. FARMS has supplied Robert F. Smith some materials needed to complete a critical text of the various editions of the Book of Mormon. The annotated text will show each change which has been made in the Book of Mormon from the first manuscript down to the newest edition. "Having an accurate text, of course, is an essential step in the scholarly study of the book," points out John Sorenson, "and Rob's unusual dedication and patience will make this significant contribution possible."

Volunteer Help

Here's a story to be emulated. Last fall, John Hall, of Culver City, California, wrote and asked if there was anything he could do to help. Jack Welch had drafted an outline comparing the uses of fasting in the Old Testament and in Judaism with the instances of fasting found in the Book of Mormon, and asked John to locate books and articles to document and expand a more complete study of the particular observances of fasting in the Book of Mormon. Using sources in the Southern California libraries, John has identified and sent to FARMS a large stack of materials. These have been given to Stephen D. Ricks who is now pursuing this subject further. John Hall reports, "Searching for these sources has been enjoyable. Please let me know if there is anything further I can do." Many thanks, John Hall.

Computers

John L. Hilton, our computer connection, with the very able assistance of his associate Kenneth D. Jenkins, has submitted an exten-

פְּרֹאשֶׁת בְּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ: וְהָאָרֶץ אֲדָמָה תְּהֵי וְבוֹהוּ יַמֵּי

sive computer report entitled "Vocabulary and Numerical Account of All Words from the King James Old Testament and New Testament and the 1830 Printing of the Book of Mormon." John explains, "This is only our first step in really answering many other statistical questions about our Book of Mormon text." Some initial observations have been made, but still need to be explained. For example, John and Ken have found that some Book of Mormon authors use only the word "wherefore" and others use only the word "therefore." Their foundational study has taken literally hundreds of hours to prepare, but the real appreciation of their efforts will come from the first-, second-, and third-generation spin-off studies.

Bibliography Project

Gary Gillum and David Whittaker, both of BYU, have taken charge of a FARMS Book of Mormon Bibliography Project. Their objective is to collect and classify, to whatever extent possible, all scholarly works on the Book of Mormon. Scott Norwood in Missouri and others have sent bibliographies to FARMS and these are good foundational efforts. Knowing what scholarship has been completed on any aspect of the Book of Mormon should advance other work and avoid unnecessary duplication of effort. Let Gary or Dave know if you have information which might be helpful to them. Gary can be reached at 6210-A HBLL, and Dave at 404 KMB, BYU, Provo, UT 84602. All help is welcomed.

Name Analysis Continues

The project on the analysis of Book of Mormon names is moving ahead. Last fall, a lengthy report submitted by Dr. Jo Ann Carlton, currently at Harvard, offered an analysis of the possible Semitic roots of most of the non-Biblical names in

the Book of Mormon. For example, she has concluded that the name Jershon comes from the Hebrew root Y-R-Š, meaning "to inherit." A fitting name for this land given to the Ammonites "for an inheritance." (Alma 27:22). Her report has been critiqued by Robert F. Smith; she has responded, and he has further critiqued those responses. Paul Hoskisson will be consolidating these efforts into a full Preliminary Report. "The interchange has been very stimulating and healthy," reports Paul. "We are seeing some very valuable progress here."

Anthon Transcript

The second attempt at translating the Anthon Transcript mentioned in the last Newsletter is, at best, "an interesting exercise," according to John Sorenson in announcing the consensus of the FARMS panel of experts. Its author treated the characters as modified Egyptian and produced a composite of names, events, and statements, some of which appear in the present Book of Mormon but not as any part of the coherent narrative of the present translated text.

Some possible identifications of individual characters are "interesting and suggestive" but cannot be considered seriously at this point because of the number of unsupported assumptions made by the author.

Seminaries

Bruce Van Orden, a FARMS participant, has recently completed two years on a seminary staff in Salt Lake revising the Seminary Book of Mormon course to be implemented 1982-83. "Several items made available through FARMS proved to be of great value to me, in presenting both the internal and external evidences of the book," he reports. "I was grateful for that support."



PRELIMINARY REPORTS

Curses and Oaths: Old/New World Comparisons

The following two abstracts summarize papers recently received by FARMS. The complete papers, including surveys of the literature and exhaustive examples, provide interesting insights into otherwise perplexing aspects of the Book of Mormon.

"Simile Curses in the Ancient Near East, Old Testament, and Book of Mormon," by Mark J. Morrise.

In this paper, Mark studies the use of the simile curse, a special form of malediction found in ancient Near Eastern documents and related texts. "Just as this wax is burned by fire, so shall Arpad be burned." This example of a simile curse appears in an Aramaic treaty of about 750 B.C. Book of Mormon readers will immediately hear echoes in the treaty between Moroni's army and the dissident followers of Zerahemnah: "Even as this scalp has fallen to the earth . . . so shall ye fall to the earth except ye will deliver up your weapons of war and depart with a covenant of peace." (Alma 44:14)

Using the system outlined by D. R. Hillers in his "Treaty Curses and the Old Testament Prophets," Mark points out that the cursing/blessing section of a treaty was one of its six standard parts. Such curses were important because they were often the only enforcement mechanism of the treaty short of military measures.

While Ancient Near Eastern treaties contained several kinds of curses, the most interesting are simile curses which seem to have been accompanied by a ritual. For instance, one treaty curse apparently was recited while a ram's head was torn off in token of the same event befalling the covenanting king

should he break the treaty. Other curses had once been accompanied by rituals but had since become largely literary.

The Old Testament contains many curses. Nevertheless, it is comparatively rare to find a simile curse as part of covenants in the Pentateuch. It is more common to find the decree type of curse that describes the consequences for wrong-doing ("Cursed be he that removes his neighbor's landmark," Deut. 27:17); or the futility curse ("you'll betroth a wife but another will bed her," Deut. 28:30). One ritual simile curse is found in Jer. 34:18 (transgressors of the covenant will become like "the calf which they cut in two").

The Book of Mormon, on the other hand, maintains a vivid affinity to the ancient Near Eastern simile curse. Beside the more common use of similes in prophetic teachings ("the life of King Noah shall be valued even as a garment in a hot furnace"), the ritual simile curse appears several times: Alma 44:14, with the scalp example already cited; Mosiah 5:14, when a strange animal is "cast out" of the flock as the disobedient person will be; Alma 46:12-27, with the symbolic rending of garments as Moroni establishes the title of liberty; and in 3 Nephi 4:28-29, with the felling of a tree on which a rebel leader has been hanged. Unlike many Near Eastern curses, these Book of Mormon curses identify God as the agent. They are not magic spells.

Even though ritual simile curses seem strange in the context of our culture, their appearance in the Book of Mormon is another indication of Near Eastern influence upon it.

"A Comparison of the Use of the Oath in the Old Testament and the Book of Mormon," by Roy Johnson.

The use of the oath, a covenant/curse combination, appears in many ancient cultures including

EN ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸ

those of the Israelite and Book of Mormon peoples. Roy concludes that its importance can be understood only on two assumptions ancient people made about the oath: that it was irrevocable, and that God himself would enforce the oath. Sometimes the oath included the types of rituals discussed in the paper above. However, a more frequent form was the use of the oath formula which specifies the power being sworn by and the actions being sworn to.

The power element in oaths in Israel's culture was nearly always a variation of "As the Lord liveth. . ." (Sometimes an attribute of God, a holy object such as the temple, or a powerful substitute for God such as the king or priest would also appear). A common but erroneous interpretation of this expression is to read it as: "It is true that God lives and it is also equally true that I will do X." Instead, the purpose of this phrase is to invoke as a living presence to witness the sincerity of the statement but even more importantly to punish anyone who dared bring "the abomination of a lie into contact with the sacred name of God."

Israelites commonly accompanied their oaths with gestures--most commonly raising the right hand or both hands to God. Even God uses this formula. In two cases, the head of a clan (Abraham and Isaac) required an oath-taker to place his hand "under the thigh" of the leader--an oath gesture still used among Arabs--and swear under penalty of being cut off from the family. There is no record, incidentally, of either kind of oath gesture being used in the Book of Mormon.

During Old Testament times there were heavy restrictions against swearing falsely but apparently few other restraints. Swearing in the name of the Lord was a sign of righteousness, actually commanded by the Lord as a sign of commitment. (Deut. 10:20). Later, oaths in the name of the Lord were forbidden except in judicial proceedings.

Roy finds that Book of Mormon peoples shared several common understandings with their Old Testament counterparts. The irrevocability and power of the oath is seen when Zoram is completely reassured by Nephi's oath that he will not be harmed; the Anti-Nephi-Lehis are willing to be slaughtered rather than break their oath, etc. Similarly, they frequently used the formula "as the Lord liveth," and the Lord also swears by himself. Another interesting resemblance is swearing "as the Lord God liveth that brought Israel up out of the land of Egypt" or something similar, which appears in both the Old Testament and the Book of Mormon.

Christ told his disciples on both continents to "swear not at all"--and specified that they should not swear by the heavens or the earth. Later we see Nephites falling into great wickedness shortly before their destruction and swearing "by the heavens. . . , and also by the throne of God" to go to battle. Mormon promptly refuses to lead them any longer because "they had sworn by all that had been forbidden them by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." It is evident that the Lord's injunctions were taken very seriously by the righteous. When Mormon took up the leadership of the armies again, he "repent[ed] of the oath which I had made." Since the righteous oath is generally held to be irrevocable, this reference is somewhat puzzling. Both the Talmud and Arab custom, however, provide for the release from an oath at the discretion of the person to whom the oath is made.

An important variation of the oath formula is Nephi's use of the oath "as I live." He makes this oath once to his brethren who are anxious to stop trying for Laban's plates and once to Zoram. This formula does not appear anywhere in the Old Testament but is a proper Arabic usage. An oath "as I live" says "expel me from the clan if I don't keep this promise," which is a

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fitting representation in the context of Nephi's promise to give Zoram a place in the family or clan of Lehi. (1 Ne. 4:32-34).

Papers Received

Several drafts of papers have come in since the last Newsletter. A paper by Blake T. Ostler, "The Throne-Theophany and Prophetic Commission in 1 Nephi," is particularly promising.

Several working papers emerged from John Sorenson's course on Archeology and the Book of Mormon, taught last fall at BYU. These studies compare Book of Mormon customs and Meso-American equivalents. FARMS Archives have retained papers on hand-held weapons by Janet K. Williamson, on diseases and curses, and wounds and healing by Camron Wright, on the art of war by Scott McKee, on fortifications by Maurice Mason, on religious similarities by Bruce Goodmansen, and on foods by Cookie Clove.

Thirty-seven other papers were written by students in Jack Welch's course on Ancient Legal Systems in the Scriptures, taught at the BYU Law School also last fall. These papers spanned a broad range of topics in Ancient Near Eastern and Book of Mormon legal institutions, law and theology, the ancient administration of justice, crimes and punishments, and civil laws. Many of these papers will be appearing in coming months as FARMS Preliminary Reports.

Report from San Francisco Region

Diane E. Wirth, regional coordinator for FARMS in the San Francisco Bay area says she is "delighted" with her association and "looks forward to its growth among both LDS and non-LDS communities." She sees a particularly fertile field among non-LDS scholars of diffusion--the concept of pre-Columbian transoceanic voyages.

As she has talked about FARMS, she finds that LDS listeners often want to be reassured, "Are they on the up-and-up? Are they supportive of Church doctrine?" Diane has found the July 1981 Newsletter useful to let people know who is in charge and that FARMS has both the spiritual and academic dimensions of the Book of Mormon at heart.

Diane's own interest in the Book of Mormon cultural background came from discussions with her non-Mormon husband. She began studying available information about the white and bearded God of the Americas which, in turn, led to research into the theory of diffusion. She summarized her findings after five years in a self-published book, Discoveries of the Truth, and through articles and papers for Pursuit, the journal of the Society for the Investigation of the Unexplained and at symposia on the archaeology of the scriptures at BYU in 1977 and 1979.

"Let's face it," says Diane, "not all LDS members are enthusiastic about archaeology and the scriptures, but those of us who are can get others excited about it. Even if they aren't interested in archaeology as such, they may still be interested in the topic of cultural similarities. I'm going to tell others about FARMS in hopes that news of this organization will reach those who can benefit from the work, energy, and time many scholars are devoting to these special reserach projects."

Diane can be reached at 3 Buckeye Lane, Danville, CA 94526, (415) 820-5312.

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