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INSIGHTS

A WINDOW ON THE ANCIENT WORLD

July 2000

"by study and also by faith" (D&C 88:118)

Herculaneum Project Exceeds Expectations

In February 1999 *INSIGHTS* reported on a proposed FARMS project involving multispectral imaging (MSI) of carbonized scrolls excavated at Herculaneum, an ancient site near Naples, Italy. One month later, a FARMS team traveled to the Biblioteca Nazionale in Naples to conduct tests on the Herculaneum papyri to see if these fragile, deteriorating texts could be successfully imaged. The test images surpassed all expectations, and the FARMS Center for the Preservation of Ancient Religious Texts (CPART) received permission to image the library's collection of Herculaneum texts.

Last fall, Steven W. Booras, CPART's manager of technical operations, returned to Naples with three assistants to begin the enormous task of digitally imaging and archiving more than 3,100 trays of mounted fragments representing some 1,700 unrolled scrolls (the remainder of the approximately 2,000 total scrolls either are too carbonized to be unrolled or have not yet been unrolled). In varying states of preservation, the unrolled scrolls require different camera setups and degrees of computer enhancement to achieve the highest degree of legibility.

"We are having great results in imaging these fragments," said Booras, "and are producing images



Legibility of this scroll fragment was greatly improved using MSI technology to image in the infrared orange.

with full text that has not been read in nearly two thousand years." He explained that the vegetable-based ink used on the scrolls is often so faded that scholars working on specific texts must use microscopes to discern the writing.

The CPART team has given copies of the superior MSI images to scholars who are working on the scrolls. "The scholarly community has paid us

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Nibley Fellows Secure Teaching Appointments

FARMS continues to sponsor a graduate fellowship program that awards financial aid to students pursuing advanced degrees in fields of special interest to FARMS. Named in honor of eminent Latter-day Saint scholar Hugh Nibley, the Nibley Fellowship is made possible by generous donations

from individuals committed to fostering the next generation of faithful scholars who will contribute to the work of the Foundation. Three such rising scholars have accepted teaching appointments and are well on their way to fulfilling the expectations behind the Nibley Fellowship.

Former Nibley Fellow Frank F. Judd Jr. is currently finishing his dissertation, "Pontius Pilate in Early Christian Literature," and expects to complete his Ph.D. at the University of North Carolina

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The Foundation for
Ancient Research
and Mormon Studies

FARMS UPDATE

A Report on Research in Progress

Number 136

The Popol Vuh and Mormon Studies

Over the years, the Popol Vuh has received considerable attention among LDS scholars as the best source of authentic ancient American history and religion outside the Book of Mormon. The new translation of the Popol Vuh,¹ complete with extensive introduction and the original Maya text in parallel columns, invites further comparison between this Mesoamerican source and LDS scriptures.

A major purpose of this new translation is to demonstrate that its K'iche' authors utilized a number of poetic constructions that have previously gone unnoticed. Among the most important of these is chiasmus, a literary device found in many ancient cultural settings, including the cultures of the Book of Mormon.

The Popol Vuh contains many other traditions and concepts that are generally found only in cultures familiar with the Hebrew Bible. Christenson cites many parallels between the Popol Vuh's cosmogenic tales and passages from the Bible and the Book of Abraham. These include the understanding that the creation was carried out by distinct gods, the beginning in primordial chaos, the creation of animals in the same three classes, man's first home being a paradisiacal land located in the east, and the destruction of the initial race of man by a great flood.²

Readers may also recognize in the Popol Vuh dim recollections of doctrines once taught in the New World by cultures associated with the Book of Mormon. One example comes from the Popol Vuh's account of the journey of the K'iche' progenitors from Tulan-Zuiva. In their travels, they carried sacred records, especially the writings of Tulan, which contained a description of the creation of the sky and the earth, prophecies of their great lords, and the generations of their forefathers (compare 1 Nephi 5:10-14). The hardship of their journey, the embarkation from a fertile land to cross a great sea, and their arrival in a new homeland are also reminiscent of the travels of Lehi's group.

The Book of Mormon states that Lehi's unified company divided into seven main lineage groups soon after arriving in the promised land (Jacob 1:13). Similarly, most major Mesoamerican cultural groups claim ancestry from seven major lineage groups. In the Popol Vuh, the K'iche' ancestors are said to have emerged from seven caves or canyons, representing the origin of the seven main royal families in highland Guatemala. Also, as was the case with the Mulekites, the people mentioned in the Popol Vuh changed their language after crossing the sea to establish a new homeland.

The central focus of the histories of both the K'iche' and the Nephite/Lamanite people was the appearance of a glorious man whose birth and appearance in the sky are associated with a great light, as brilliant as the sun, that dispels the darkness. Moreover, the death of a god associated with a cross-shaped tree of life was a powerful motif in Mesoamerican theology. In the Popol Vuh, the god One Hunahpu descended into the underworld, where he was sacrificed by the lords of death and hung in a dead gourd tree, which immediately sprang to life and bore a white fruit said to be "truly delicious."³

Interesting echoes such as these invite closer examination. The new translation of the Popol Vuh now makes these points accessible to a broad reading audience in the full context of the mythic sections of this pre-Columbian Maya text.

NOTES

1. Allen J. Christenson, trans. and ed., *Popol Vuh: The Mythic Sections—Tales of First Beginnings from the Ancient K'iche'-Maya* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2000).

2. See *ibid.*, 25-34.

3. See *ibid.*, 80-81, 83.

Based on research by Allen J. Christenson



FARMS WEB PAGE UPDATE

<http://farms.byu.edu>

This month the Featured Papers section of the FARMS Web site is spotlighting three FARMS papers of special interest to students of the Book of Mormon. Larry C. Porter's "The Book of Mormon: Historical Setting for Its Translation and Publication," Richard L. Anderson's "Book of Mormon Witnesses," and Stephen D. Ricks's "The Translation and Publication of the Book of Mormon" are available to all visitors to the site to read online or to download and print at no cost. (For help in printing these papers in a reader-friendly format, see the Web page section in the April issue of *INSIGHTS*.)

Porter's study chronicles a number of key events between May 1829 and April 1830 that relate to the coming forth of the

Book of Mormon. He begins by discussing the Prophet Joseph Smith's translation work at the Whitmer farm and the selection and experiences of the Three and Eight Witnesses. He then focuses on the printing of the Book of Mormon, an endeavor that presented many challenges to Joseph Smith, from trouble finding a printer and delay while punctuation was added to the unauthorized printing of portions of the book and constant local antagonism. Porter discusses early efforts to preach the restored gospel using the proof sheets from the Book of Mormon, and he also mentions early labors to sell the book.

Anderson's article gives an overview of the secular and divine functions of witnesses, refers to scriptural prophecies

that witnesses would be called to view the gold plates, and notes how the two sets of witnesses complement each other. Focusing on the Three Witnesses, Anderson describes the circumstances of their calling, details aspects of their lives, comments on their character traits, and responds to the typical questions of skeptics. He emphasizes that all of the witnesses were honest men with a divine mission who never denied their testimonies of the Book of Mormon.

Ricks's study explores the method and the instruments (the seer stone and the Urim and Thummim) that Joseph Smith used to translate the Book of Mormon plates. Ricks assembles many interesting details gleaned from accounts by the Prophet Joseph Smith's family and associates who witnessed the process of translation and bore testimony to the divine origin of the Book of Mormon.

Insights revisited

Nibley Counters World's Perception of Prophets' Role

"What is a prophet?" Hugh Nibley asks in his book *The World and the Prophets*, observing that both Jewish and Christian scholars have always agreed that "Abraham . . . and the prophets are dead." He observes that, with the prophets being thus disposed of, the word *prophet* has tragically come to mean almost any individual of more than ordinary insight, learning, or rhetorical gifts. Given this situation, Nibley believes that his larger purpose of vindicating the prophets is best

undertaken by first getting fair-minded people to agree on a few things that a real prophet is not.

First, a prophet is not a person who attempts to teach others to be prophets. Nibley draws from the ancient *Didache*, which gives a specific and clear test for distinguishing between a true and a false prophet. If anyone who claimed to be a prophet attempted to teach anything of his skill to another, he was *not* a true prophet, the saints were advised. Prophecy is a direct gift from

God; it cannot be conveyed from one man to another; it cannot be transmitted through any courses of instruction. Peter, for example, had the certain knowledge that Jesus Christ was the Son of God. Did he get that knowledge from Jesus, his master and teacher? No, he did not. "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 16:17). Here was Peter taking direct instruction from the mouth of the Lord

himself, yet it was not from him but from his Father that Peter got the testimony of Christ. The knowledge of salvation is not transmitted from one man to another horizontally, as it were; it is not passed from one generation to the next as a great earthbound tradition. A testimony, that is, the sure knowledge that Jesus is the Christ, the Savior and Redeemer of the world, is received not by horizontal but by vertical descent.

Second, a prophet is not a scholar in the sense that the prophetic gift, the highest form of revelation, coming directly from above, cannot be transmitted through any course of instruction. The scholar and the learned divine must necessarily get their knowledge from the written word, and then trouble begins. The prophet, on the other hand, who may well be illiterate, gets his knowledge by direct intercourse with heaven. The orientation is entirely different. Nibley quotes the early Christian historian Eusebius, who wrote that the apostles of Christ "neither knew nor made any effort to know about the art of persuasion or skill with words as taught in the schools. The only power they ever made use of was the assurance of the Holy Ghost and the miraculous power of Christ operating through them, by which they preached the kingdom of God throughout the world" (*Ecclesiastical History* III, 24).

"The world will not admit that there can be more than one kind of inspiration, but the saints have always known better," Nibley writes.

Finally, a prophet is not a reformer, but rather a witness. Nibley explains: "Criticism of the world is always implicit in a prophet's message of repentance, but he is *not* sent for the purpose of criticizing the world. Men know the world is wicked, and the wickedest ones often know it best. To denounce human folly has been the avocation of teachers and philosophers in every age, and their reward, surprisingly enough, has not been death but usually a rather handsome fee. . . . It was *not* the Sermon on the Mount that drove men to crucify the Lord. It was not for their moral tirades that the prophets of old and the apostles were stoned. . . . What, then, did Christ and the apostles do and say that drove men into paroxysms of rage? They performed tangible miracles such as could not be denied, and they reported what they had seen and heard. That was all. It was as witnesses endowed with power

from on high that they earned the hatred of the world. . . . To come down to modern times, why were people so furiously angry with Joseph Smith? It was not for being a reformer or rebuking a naughty world. . . . In what did the modern prophet's deadly offense consist? In the summer of 1833 a much-publicized mass meeting was held in Missouri to protest the admission of Mormon immigrants into Jackson County, and this was the official objection: 'The committee express fears that . . . they will soon have all the offices in the county in their hands; and that the lives and property of other citizens would be insecure, under the administration of men who are so ignorant and superstitious as to believe that they have been the subjects of miraculous and supernatural cures; hold converse with God and his angels, and possess and exercise the gifts of divination and unknown

tongues.' Charles Dickens, as is well known, was very favorably impressed by the Mormons he saw both in America and England, but one thing about them he could not tolerate: 'What the Mormons do,' he wrote in 1851, 'seems to be excellent; what they *say* is mostly nonsense' because 'it exhibits fanaticism in its newest garb,' namely 'seeing visions in the age of railways.' That

put them in the same class with the prophets and apostles of old. 'We know Abraham is our father, and Moses is our prophet, but who is this guy?' 'Abraham is dead, and the prophets are dead—who do you think you are?'"

A prophet, then, receives his knowledge directly from God. He does not seek to pass on his gift, rely on the wisdom of scholars, or reform the world. He simply seeks to reveal the word of God to men. As the Apostle Paul wrote: "I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, *neither was I taught it*, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ" (Galatians 1:11–12; emphasis added). "Since the restoration of the gospel," Nibley concludes, "such revelation is again available to mankind, provided they heed the words of the prophets and do not regard their own discoveries and conclusions as the end of knowledge."

—Adapted from Hugh Nibley, "Prophets and Scholars" and "A Prophet's Reward," in *The World and the Prophets* (1987).

"The world will not admit that there can be more than one kind of inspiration, but the saints have always known better."

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Herculaneum Papyri (continued from page 1)

high compliments," said Booras. "One scholar stated that the imaging project is life-changing work." How so? The MSI images are revealing new information from text that conventional photography and other methods cannot capture. "There have been countless new words, names, phrases, letters, titles, and even geometry that have changed previously published editions of the Herculaneum texts or have added new information on work in progress," Booras said. "This project is generating a lot of interest."

The University of Naples plans to adjust its curriculum on papyrology, the classics, and related areas in order to account for the new light that the Herculaneum archive is shedding on Greco-Roman ideologies and philosophy from the third century B.C. to the time of the early Christian church.

Another example of the stir this project is creating concerns the Discovery Channel of Europe, which recently completed filming for a documentary on the Herculaneum papyri. When the film director saw the stunning MSI images, he decided on-site to change the documentary to feature the papyri rather than focus on Herculaneum and its history.

CPART first considered this project at the behest of Professor Marcello Gigante, director of the Herculaneum papyri publication team and an emeritus professor at the University of Naples. At an international papyrology conference in 1998, Professor Gigante was impressed with a CPART team's report of using MSI technology to image the carbonized scrolls found in ancient Petra, in southwestern Jordan, and saw great potential in engaging CPART's technical expertise for the Herculaneum project.

FARMS expects that the Herculaneum project will effectively preserve the ancient texts in electronic format and accelerate the international scholarly effort to publish accurate transcriptions of those texts and related scholarship.

Nibley Fellows (continued from page 1)

at Chapel Hill soon. Last fall Judd accepted a tenure-track appointment with BYU's Department of Ancient Scripture and has been teaching undergraduate New Testament and Book of Mormon classes. Before coming to BYU, he was a teaching

Reprint of Herculaneum Report Available

FARMS is offering a reprint of a published technical report describing a CPART team's groundbreaking work of applying multispectral imaging technology to produce stunning new images of the Herculaneum papyri. Written by Steven W. Booras of CPART and David R. Seely, an associate professor of ancient scripture at BYU, the report appeared in English in the respected Italian journal *Cronache Ercolanesi* (vol. 29, 1999, 95-100).

The authors begin by reviewing FARMS projects that fostered the development at BYU of multispectral imaging and computer software technologies that have enabled CPART to capture high-quality digitized images of ancient texts and to store them in searchable electronic databases. They describe the equipment, setup, and test procedure they used during imaging to achieve the greatest contrast between the faded ink script and the carbonized background of nine papyri in various states of preservation.

The report concludes with an analysis of the results of that testing phase. Image quality "far exceeded expectations," the authors write. Even the creased and uneven fragments, which in the past posed formidable photographic challenges, were imaged with a uniform focus that made all of the text legible. The quality was so good, in fact, that the next step of enhancing the images by computer could well be dispensed with.

To obtain a copy of the full report, use the enclosed order form to select one of four ways to place your order.

associate at UNC, where he taught classes in Old Testament, New Testament, and Judaism. He was a volunteer teacher at the LDS institutes of religion at UNC and Duke University. Judd has presented and published papers in connection with BYU's annual

Sidney B. Sperry Symposium and with the Book of Mormon Symposium sponsored by the BYU Religious Studies Center. He has coauthored a review in the *FARMS Review of Books*, and slated for publication in that journal is his review of John W. Welch's book *An Epistle from the New Testament Apostles*.

Jared A. Ludlow recently successfully defended his doctoral dissertation, "A Narrative Critical Study of the Two Greek Recensions of 'The Testament of Abraham,'" and expects to publish it sometime next year. He has earned his degree in a joint program from the University of California, Berkeley, and Graduate Theological Union. The focus of his studies in Near Eastern religions has been Second Temple Judaism. At the 1998 Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium, he presented a paper titled "Emulating Abraham as a Disciple of Jesus: Discipleship Themes from John 8:31-59"; and his paper on Abraham's visions of the heavens, delivered at a FARMS conference on the Book of Abraham last October, is being prepared for publication in a volume covering the proceedings of that conference. This fall Ludlow will join the faculty at BYU—Hawaii with a tenure-track appointment in the Department of History. He will also teach religion courses there.

Carl W. Griffin continues his education as a Ph.D. candidate in early Christian studies at The Catholic University of America, in Washington, D.C. Through a FARMS grant awarded to BYU's Department of Philosophy, this summer Griffin will continue assisting David Paulsen, a BYU professor of philosophy, in research for a book tentatively titled *The Mormon Doctrine of Divine Embodiment*. A summary of their project as reported in a FARMS noontime lecture appears in the April issue of *INSIGHTS*. Griffin's article "Peace" will be published in a forthcoming Deseret Book volume titled *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, for which he also contributed many other smaller entries. Griffin will be teaching part-time this fall in BYU's Department of Church History and Doctrine.

FARMS is pleased to see the fruits of the Nibley Fellowship program as it continues to help prepare promising young scholars to enter careers involving research related to the Book of Mormon and other ancient texts.

INSIGHTS

A WINDOW ON THE ANCIENT WORLD

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The Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS) encourages and supports research about the Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ and other ancient scriptures. It also works to preserve ancient religious documents.

FARMS is a nonprofit educational foundation at Brigham Young University. Its main research interests include ancient history, language, literature, culture, geography, politics, and law relevant to the scriptures. Although such subjects are of secondary importance when compared with the spiritual and eternal messages of the scriptures, solid research and academic perspectives alone can supply certain kinds of useful information, even if only tentatively, concerning many significant and interesting questions about the scriptures.

The Foundation works to make interim and final reports about this research available widely, promptly, and economically. These publications are peer reviewed to ensure scholarly standards are met. The proceeds from the sale of these publications, including most royalties, are used to support further research and publications on the scriptures. 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 take more seriously these ancient witnesses of the atonement of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

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