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Insights

A WINDOW ON THE ANCIENT WORLD VOLUME 21 | 2001

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Scholar Explains Isaiah's Imagery with Pictures

The book of Isaiah has often been a challenge to students and teachers alike. The prophet Isaiah dressed his prophetic writings in vivid imagery and symbolism that are not always clear to modern readers, whose world is far removed from that of eighth-century-B.C. Israel. A new book by Hebrew scholar Donald W. Parry, *Visualizing Isaiah*, helps bring that world—and Isaiah's prophetic writings—closer to home via a lavish gallery of provocative images with illuminating commentary.

Isaiah, a master poet, expressed his visions and prophecies using imagery and symbolism from the world around him.



The many photographs in Parry's book help bring home to modern readers the imagery Isaiah used.

He used politics, religion, geography, and social conditions in the land of Israel. He also drew on the natural world, including animals, insects, plants, rocks, elements, and heavenly

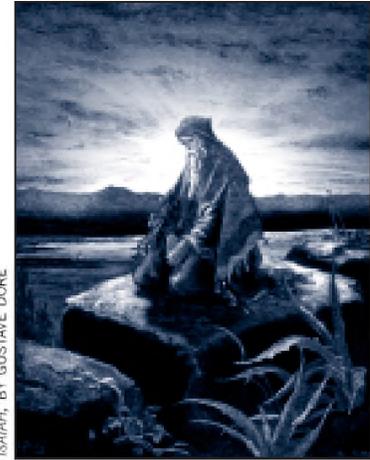
objects. His writings mention colors, foods, armor, weaponry, numbers, occupations, persons, ecclesiastical offices, social relationships, human anatomy, places, and architecture.

Yet many of the symbols that Isaiah used are unfamiliar to

modern readers, while more familiar symbols have changed in meaning since Isaiah's time. This large-format, full-color book features photographs, charts, illustrations, and explanatory commentary to help modern readers understand many of Isaiah's most puzzling symbols.

The illustrations range from herds of sheep to looms and weavers, and from old stone feeding troughs to ancient cisterns and a model of the laver used in Solomon's Temple to hold ceremonial cleansing water. Photographs of ancient cities and ruined

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ISAAH, BY GUSTAVE DORÉ

Book of Mormon Symposium Marks Milestone

On 20 October 2001 a FARMS symposium titled "The Original Text of the Book of Mormon: Findings from the Critical Text Project" drew a near-capacity crowd at BYU's Harold B. Lee Library auditorium as well as a few dozen participants from California to New York to Mexico who viewed the Web-cast proceedings live via home computer.

Celebrating FARMS's recent groundbreaking publication of the project's first two volumes—

typographical facsimiles of the original and printer's manuscripts of the Book of Mormon—the event featured two presentations by BYU professor Royal Skousen, the editor and principal investigator, and remarks by three collaborators and two respondents.

Skousen, a professor of English and linguistics who has worked on the Critical Text Project since 1988, said that his research in this area aims to show every change that the Book of Mormon has undergone from the original and printer's manuscripts through its various editions since 1830. Scribal and printer's errors, as well as Joseph Smith's editing for the 1837 edition, account for the majority of those

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Why Early Christianity Adopted Greek Philosophy

It is common in LDS discourse to say that Christianity went into apostasy because it was corrupted by Greek philosophy. There is no question that by the fourth century, Christian theologians had rearticulated Christian belief and understanding using the content and methods of philosophy, with a popular version of Platonism providing most of the resource. The creeds and their defenders make that evident. But I will argue here that this incorporation of a popular contemporary philosophical tradition into Christianity was the result—not the cause—of the apostasy as understood by many Latter-day Saints.

Before Clement of Alexandria and during the first century and a half of Christianity, references to contemporary philosophies by Christians served principally rhetorical functions in dealing with outsiders. Following a tradition going back to Paul (Acts 17:18–31), missionaries could cite beliefs of contemporary philosophers that were similar to the teachings of Christ as a means of introducing their own message. This was an attractive strategy in that the philosophical community shared with the Christians a seriousness about living a good life and a critical rejection of the vulgar excesses of pagan worship practices and the silliness of pagan mythology.

Christian apologists, such as Justin Martyr, found the philosophical beliefs of the Roman elites a most useful ground on which to defend their own Christianity.

But Clement took a much bigger step near the end of the second century when he consciously adopted the rational methods of philosophy as the tools of Christians in pursuit of the truth. While this philosophical gambit was never uncontroversial, it spread rapidly throughout the Christian community and was both officially and firmly established by the fourth-century councils that produced the Christian creeds. The interesting discovery for Latter-day Saints comes when they discover that traditional Christians—Protestant, Catholic, and Eastern—regard this adoption of Hellenist philosophy as the salvation of the incomplete and struggling Christian community. It is also worth noting that Clement was consciously following the example of Philo of Alexandria, the Jewish philosopher who had written volumes in the decades just before Christ's ministry in which he allegorized the Old Testament systematically to make it accord with a contemporary form of Platonism.

By the last two decades of the second century, not only had all the authorized apostles

and prophets disappeared, but the first generation of those who knew and heard them were also gone. Lacking faithful witnesses, Christians were left without authoritative voices to clarify scriptural ambiguities or to give divine direction in the resolution of new challenges for the community. Like his contemporaries, Clement recognized that “the prophets and apostles knew not the arts by which the exercises of philosophy are exhibited” (310). Rather, he explains, the prophets and disciples were of the Spirit and knew these things infallibly by faith. But this is not possible for others, says Clement, disagreeing with some of his own contemporaries who insisted on avoiding contact with philosophy, logic, or natural science, “demand[ing] bare faith alone” (309). Clement sees their approach as sterile and ignorant. He urges instead the cultivation of the vine (Christ)—watering, pruning, and tending so that it might bring forth good fruit. So by bringing everything to bear on the truth (geometry, music, grammar, and philosophy itself), “he guards the faith against assault” (310). Only one educated in these things “can distinguish sophistry from philosophy” or the varieties of philosophical teaching “from the truth itself” (310). From this he concludes it is necessary “for him who desires to be partaker of the power of God, to treat of intellectual subjects by philosophizing” (310).

Clement quite explicitly characterized Greek philosophy

as divinely provided for Christianity in his times. He calls Hellenistic culture “preparatory” and argues that “with philosophy itself . . . [it has] come down from God to men” (308). This preparatory movement is illustrated for all Israel in the case of Abraham, who attained wisdom by “passing from the contemplation of heavenly things to the faith and righteousness which are according to God” (306). And Hagar (the young and fruitful maiden) was given to Abraham so that, by allegorical interpretation, he could “embrace secular culture as youthful, and a handmaid” (306). “Philosophy is characterized by investigation into truth and the nature of things (this is the truth of which

the Lord Himself said, ‘I am the truth’); and that, again, the preparatory training for rest in Christ exercises the mind, rouses the intelligence, and begets an inquiring shrewdness, by means of the true philosophy, which the initiated possess, having found it, or rather received it, from the truth itself” (307). Hence the Christian view of philosophy as the (fruitful) handmaiden to theology.

Clement claimed not to be promoting any particular philosophical school of his day (Stoic, Platonic, Epicurean, or Aristotelian), but identified philosophy (the love of wisdom) with “whatever has been well said by each of those sects, which teach righteousness along with a science

pervaded by piety,—this eclectic whole I call philosophy” (308). So rather than follow a particular non-Christian school, he strives to be “conversant with all kinds of wisdom” and bring “again together the separate fragments, and makes them one” in order that he might without peril “contemplate the perfect Word, the truth” (313).

And so it was that Christianity, bereft of its eyewitnesses, and witnesses of its eyewitnesses, moved on to philosophy as a source of truth and stability. 📖

Note

All quotations are from Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies*, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 2.

By Noel B. Reynolds

Symposium continued from page 1

changes, most of which are minor and do not affect meaning. Skousen’s research shows that five-sixths of the Book of Mormon was typeset from the printer’s manuscript, virtually 100 percent of which still exists. Because only 28 percent of the original manuscript is extant, some suspected scribal errors in the printer’s manuscript and later editions cannot be traced to the original manuscript and thus remain conjectural.

Major steps in Skousen’s research include the following: (1) the Historical Department of the LDS Church allowed Skousen to transcribe the text from ultraviolet photographs of the original manuscript and later to examine the remaining sheets of the manuscript itself; (2) the RLDS Church loaned him a photographic reproduction of the printer’s manuscript and later allowed him to examine the manuscript firsthand and have it photographed in color; (3) he located and examined scattered fragments of the original manuscript owned by private parties; and (4) the creation of a complete computerized collation of the entire text for 20 editions and the two manuscripts greatly facilitated the identification of variants. Skousen also reviewed evidence showing

how certain errors crept into the text (such as when a scribe misheard Joseph or miscopied from the original manuscript) and how later grammatical editing sometimes removed non-English Hebrew idioms.

Robert Espinosa, digital projects librarian at the Lee library, described his team’s painstaking work of humidifying, unfolding, photographing, and identifying water-damaged fragments of the original manuscript. Espinosa’s identification of different paper types used in both manuscripts also proved helpful in Skousen’s research.

Ron Romig, archivist for the Community of Christ (formerly the RLDS Church), spoke of how his associates “had to move heaven and earth” to allow Skousen access to the printer’s manuscript. In 1992 the RLDS Church also permitted Nevin Skousen, a professional photographer, to shoot color photographs of that manuscript and allowed Royal Skousen to examine 22 first-edition copies of the Book of Mormon (none exactly alike, because at various times during the printing of the 1830 edition the press was stopped so typos could be corrected).

Larry Draper, curator of Mormon Americana at the Lee library (formerly a librarian at the LDS Church’s Historical Department), discussed his role of providing Skousen access to 15 post-1830 editions

of the Book of Mormon so they could be electronically scanned to create a searchable database. Using props, Draper demonstrated how the forms for the 1830 edition (large sheets of paper containing 16 pages of the text) were printed, folded, and cut.

In his second presentation, titled “The Systematic Text of the Book of Mormon,” Skousen emphasized the remarkable internal consistency of the text. His computer searches of variant readings in both manuscripts and 20 editions of the book confirm this fact. For example, all 47 occurrences of the phrase “thus ended [a period of time, usually a year]” originally used the past tense form *ended*, whereas the current text uses the present tense form *endeth* four times (a result of typos in later editions). Yet Skousen cautioned against assuming that any deviation from an apparent pattern is an error, because there are also examples of original, unique readings among similar expressions in the text. He showed examples of apparent errors of transmission and editing and concluded that not one of them alters the basic meaning of the book or its doctrine.

In concluding remarks Richard L. Anderson, emeritus professor of ancient scripture at BYU, called Skousen’s work “brilliant” and “persuasive,” and Daniel C. Peterson, associate executive director of the Institute, pointed out that the evidence from the project supports witnesses’ accounts of the divine manner in which the Book of Mormon came forth.

Skousen’s work on the history of the Book of Mormon text and his analysis of textual variants, plus the complete electronic collation, are expected to be published sometime in 2004. 

Isaiah’s Imagery continued from page 1

walls help the reader to imagine how Israel looked when Isaiah wrote his prophecies. All of the images are accompanied by scripture passages and commentary by the author. Charts throughout the book explain archaic language, give timetables, and show scripture parallels.

Visualizing Isaiah is divided into seven sections, each detailing one broad aspect of the book of Isaiah: “Ancient Israel,” “Ancient Israel’s Neighbors,” “Warnings to the Wicked,” “Blessings and Duties of the Righteous,” “The Restoration and the Gathering,” “The Earthly Ministry of Jesus Christ,” and “The Second Coming of Jesus Christ.” The book also includes a scripture index, a list of sources consulted, and a section on how to use the book.

Donald W. Parry is associate professor of Hebrew language and literature at Brigham Young University and a leading scholar in the study of Isaiah. For purchasing information, see the enclosed order form or visit the FARMS Web site. 

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FARMS is a research arm 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.

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