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Insights

A WINDOW ON THE ANCIENT WORLD

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New Review a Double Issue

The latest *FARMS Review of Books* is actually two issues in one. It reviews 15 books in the usual categories of Book of Mormon, Mormon studies, and biblical studies but also devotes more than 100 pages to a multipronged response to an evangelical book titled *The New Mormon Challenge: Responding to the Latest Defenses of a Fast-Growing Movement*.

Review editor Daniel C. Peterson's introduction features remarks he gave at a specially arranged panel discussion between Latter-day Saint and evangelical scholars at last year's annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion. Peterson explains why philosophy and systematic theology are not important modes of LDS religious reflection and then questions the motives behind such publications as *The New Mormon Challenge*.

Ralph C. Hancock responds to the book *The Lord's University: Freedom and Authority at BYU*, wherein authors Bryan Waterman and Brian Kagel (former student editors of the *Student Review* and

the *Daily Universe*, respectively) document the history of academic freedom conflicts at BYU during the 1990s. Hancock, a professor of political science at BYU, notes that while amply recording instances of "ideological commotion at BYU," the authors are too quick to defend embittered faculty members regardless of their views and thus show a lack of "any capacity to criticize even the most radical critiques of the church." According to Hancock, the first few chapters of the book are more even-handed and useful to "anyone trying to find a way into the historical record of BYU's developing mission in the face of various challenges from the evolving culture it partly inhabits."

John E. Clark reviews three books that propose a Great Lakes setting for Book of Mormon geography. He evaluates them using the standards of scholarship, focusing on the authors' arguments that can be evaluated against established facts and leaving out issues of personal belief and speculation. After considering each approach individually, Clark, an anthropology professor at BYU, discusses how the authors treat

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Treatise on Ethics Launches Eastern Christian Texts Series

The Institute is pleased to announce the publication of the first volume in the Eastern Christian Texts series, part of the Middle Eastern Texts Initiative. *The Reformation of Morals* was written by Yahyā ibn 'Adī (893–974 C.E.), one of the most important Christian authors to have written in Arabic. Although devoutly Syrian Orthodox, Yahyā ibn 'Adī studied in Baghdad under the Muslim philosopher al-Fārābī and counted Muslims and Christians of all sects among his own disciples. He was a leading figure in

the 10th-century translation movement in Baghdad and the author of numerous works of philosophy and theology.

Translator Sidney H. Griffith is professor of Semitic languages at The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., and chair of the Eastern Christian Texts advisory board. He has distinguished himself as one of the foremost scholars of Arabic and Syrian Christianity. His translation of Ibn 'Adī's important work marks its first appearance in English.

The Reformation of Morals is a treatise on social virtues and vices in which Ibn 'Adī gives advice on cultivating the former and extirpating the latter. His

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Internal Textual Evidence for the Egyptian Origin of Nephi's Name

A proposed etymology of the Book of Mormon name *Nephi* is that it derives from the ancient Egyptian word *nfr*,¹ which as an adjective means “good,” “fine,” or “goodly” and as a noun denotes “kindness” or “goodness.”² By Lehi’s time, this word was probably pronounced “nēfē” (NEH-fee).³ Two Book of Mormon passages contain strong evidence for such an etymology.

In the opening verse of the Book of Mormon, Nephi introduces himself as follows:

I, *Nephi*, having been born of *goodly* parents, . . . was taught somewhat in all the learning of my father; and having seen many afflictions . . . [and] having had a great knowledge of the *goodness* and the mysteries of God, therefore I make a record of my proceedings in my days. (1 Nephi 1:1)

Nephi’s use of words that translate into English as “goodly” and “goodness” makes this passage even more beautiful and meaningful if we also understand the name *Nephi* to denote “good,” “goodly,” or “goodness.” The wordplay perhaps suggests why the name *Nephi* so befits its bearer: he is *nfr*, or “goodly,” because he was born of “*goodly* parents” and is one endowed with a “knowledge of the *goodness* and mysteries of God.”

That Lehi would give his son an Egyptian name is not unlikely,

since Lehi’s language “consist[ed] of the learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyptians” (1 Nephi 1:2). One reason Nephi was quick to point out his father’s knowledge of Egyptian may have been to explain the origin of his non-Hebrew name.

More evidence surfaces in Helaman 5:6–7, where Helaman explains to his two sons, Nephi and Lehi, why he gave them their names:

Behold, I have given unto you the names of our first parents who came out of the land of Jerusalem . . . [so that] ye may remember their works; and when ye remember their works ye may know . . . that they were *good*. Therefore, my sons, I would that ye should do that which is *good*, that it may be said of you, and also written, even as it has been said and written of them.

Where was it written that their namesakes were “good”? In 1 Nephi 1:1, Lehi is called a “goodly” parent, and Nephi’s name corresponds to the Egyptian word meaning “good.” Helaman 5:6–7 implies that Helaman was aware of the meaning of the name *Nephi* and that he hoped this honored name would also befit his own sons by virtue of their good works.

The wordplay in 1 Nephi 1:1 and Helaman 5:6–7 is not unlike that of the name etymologies in

the Hebrew Bible, particularly in Genesis. Genesis 3:20 states that “Adam called his wife’s name Eve; because she was the mother of all *living*” (emphasis added). Here the Hebrew name *hawwah* (“lifegiver”) is juxtaposed with the substantive participle *hay* (“living”), both of which derive from the trilateral root *hyh* or *hwh* (“to live”). Many such examples could be cited from the Bible.

As research on the text of the Book of Mormon continues, evidence mounts concerning its antiquity and textual complexity. The interplay of the name *Nephi* with words that are translated “goodly,” “good,” and “goodness” provides further evidence that the Book of Mormon is, in fact, translation literature. 

Notes

1. See John Gee, “A Note on the Name *Nephi*,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1/1 (1992): 189–91; and “Four Suggestions on the Origin of the Name *Nephi*,” in *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1999), 1–5.
2. Raymond O. Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian* (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1999), 131–32.
3. The final *r* in *nfr* was dropped long before the time of Lehi, and evidence from the Coptic form and Aramaic transliteration of the word suggests that it ended in the vowel *i*. See the discussion in the articles by John Gee listed in note 1.

By Matthew L. Bowen

A Note on Benjamin and Lehi

Mosiah 1:2–6, which describes how King Benjamin taught his sons, seems to be patterned after Lehi’s teaching of his son Nephi. The italicized words in the extracts below highlight the parallels in the two accounts.

Both passages describe teaching and mention “fathers” or “parents” (the Hebrew uses one word for both), the name(s) of the son(s), “Jerusalem,” the “language of the Egyptians,” and the “mysteries of God” and declare that the record is “true.” This is one of many other examples of how Nephite writers relied on earlier records as they recorded their history. Finding such direct correspondence in widely separated passages of the Book of Mormon is particularly significant when we realize that evidence suggests that Joseph Smith translated the book of Mosiah and all that follows it before turning to translate the small plates containing the record of Nephi.¹

Mormon discovered the small plates as he was recording events from the life of King Benjamin (Words of Mormon 1:3). Perhaps it was Benjamin’s use of the opening verses of 1 Nephi that prompted Mormon to search among the Nephite records to find the earlier account. While the kings kept the

large plates of Nephi, the small plates were passed along in the family of Nephi’s brother Jacob until Amaleki turned them over to King Benjamin (Omni 1:25). It is significant that Benjamin’s use of Nephi’s opening words are found at the point in the record where the king would have recently received the small plates.²

Notes

1. See John W. Welch and Tim Rathbone, “How Long Did It Take to Translate the Book of Mormon?” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 1–8. The entry in the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* on “Book of Mormon Translation by Joseph Smith” was based on this article. See also Royal Skousen, ed., *The Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon: Typographical Facsimile of the Extant Text* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2000), 33.
2. We have a parallel situation regarding the record of Ether. Soon after translating that record, which details the Jaredite contentions for the kingship (Mosiah 28:17), Mosiah informed his people of the potential dangers should one of his sons become king and his brother fight against him (Mosiah 29:5–13). See the discussion in my FARMS Update “King Mosiah and the Judgeship,” *INSIGHTS*, November 2000.

By John A. Tvedtnes

1 Nephi 1:1–4

I, Nephi, having been born of goodly *parents*, therefore I was *taught* somewhat in *all the learning of my father*; and having seen many afflictions in the course of my days, nevertheless, having been *highly favored of the Lord* in all my days; yea, having had a great *knowledge of the goodness and the mysteries of God*, therefore I make a record of my proceedings in my days. Yea, I make a record in the *language of my father*, which consists of the learning of the Jews and the *language of the Egyptians*. And I know that *the record which I make is true*; and I make it with mine own hand; and I make it according to my knowledge. For it came to pass in the commencement of the first year of the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah, (my father, Lehi, having *dwelt at Jerusalem* in all his days); and in that same year there came many prophets, prophesying unto the people that they must repent, or the great city Jerusalem must be destroyed.

Mosiah 1:2–6

And it came to pass that he had three sons; and he called their names Mosiah, and Helorum, and Helaman. And he caused that *they should be taught in all the language of his fathers*, that thereby they might . . . know concerning the prophecies which had been spoken by the mouths of their *fathers*, which were delivered them *by the hand of the Lord*. And *he also taught them* concerning the records which were engraven on the plates of brass, saying: . . . were it not for these plates . . . we must have suffered in ignorance . . . not knowing *the mysteries of God*. For it were not possible that our father, Lehi, could have . . . *taught them to his children*, except it were for the help of these plates; for he *having been taught in the language of the Egyptians* therefore he could read these engravings, and *teach them to his children*, that thereby they could *teach them to their children*, . . . that we might read and *understand of his mysteries*. . . O my sons, I would that ye should remember that *these sayings are true*, and also that *these records are true*. And behold, also the plates of *Nephi*, which contain the records and the sayings of our fathers from the time *they left Jerusalem* until now, and *they are true*.

Treatise continued from page 1

work encourages the effort to promote moral perfection, especially among kings and other members of the social elite. While there are many echoes of Hellenistic moral philosophy in the presentation, the topical profile of the work and the language the author uses reveal his participation in the Baghdad circle of philosophers and intellectuals—both Christian and Muslim—who were responsible for much that has come to be regarded as typical of the classical culture of the Islamic world. In fact, this text by a Christian has sometimes been attributed to one or another famous Muslim author. It stands now as an important Christian contribution, in Arabic, to a strand of moral philosophy integral to the Islamic intellectual tradition.

“The worthiest thing a man chooses for himself is his own fulfillment and perfection,” writes Ibn ‘Adi; “he will not stop short of attaining the highest degree of it, nor will he be content with any failure to achieve its final reach. Part of a man’s fulfillment and perfection is to be well trained in honorable and good moral qualities, to refrain from evil and wrong ones, in all his circumstances to uphold the canons of virtue, and in all his actions to turn aside from the ways of vice.”

Much of the work describes all the virtues that

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the perfect, or complete, person must seek and the vices to avoid. For example, Ibn ‘Adi defines abstinence as “the soul’s control of the appetites” and goes on to advise that they “should be indulged according to a measure: no more than what is needed, no less than what safeguards soul and strength.” And further: “[Humility] is renouncing the assumption of superiority and displaying a low social profile, as well as an antipathy toward aggrandizement and toward the multiplication of honors. It is also that a man avoids boasting about anything in which there is some merit, or vaunting his social standing or wealth, and that he is on his guard against conceit and arrogance.”

Ibn ‘Adi’s conception of “the complete man” is one who is “watchful over all his moral qualities, attentive to all his faults, and wary of the intrusion of any defect. He will be ready to put every virtue into action, assiduous to reach the goal, passionate for the image of perfection. He will be disposed to find pleasure in good moral actions. He will be radically alert, inimical to blameworthy habits, and solicitous to reform himself. He will be disinclined to overestimate the virtues he will have acquired but inclined to regard the least of the vices as grave.” To purchase a copy of this book, use the enclosed mail-order form or visit the bookstore section of the FARMS Web site. 

Review continued from page 1

specific items such as the narrow neck of land, the river Sidon, demographics, and archaeology. For example, one author “simply ignores all evidence for temporal placement that does not suit her purpose,” he says, and another correlates the river Sidon with the Susquehanna River, which “flows southward rather than northward, as required by Book of Mormon description.” The major flaw of all three theories is that none “begins by creating an

internal map to compare to the real world[,] . . . a recipe for disaster because it lures the model builder into distorting the meaning of the text to fit the proposed real-world setting.” All three authors assume that Hill Cumorah in New York is the hill mentioned in the Book of Mormon, a setting that Clark argues does not work. He concludes that “when we pay attention to time and to cultural context, it becomes clear that the events described in the Book of Mormon do not seem to have occurred in the Great Lakes area.”

Two reviews deal with a psychoanalytical approach to the lives of Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon. Michael D. Jibson, director of residency education and clinical associate professor in the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Michigan, reviews Robert D. Anderson's book *Inside the Mind of Joseph Smith: Psychobiography and the Book of Mormon*. Jibson deals crisply with Anderson's "brutal" assessment of Joseph Smith's character: "It was a puzzle to me that anyone, especially a psychiatrist, could see another human being as so utterly unidimensional." Questioning the validity of psychoanalysis in interpreting biographical data, Jibson rebuts Anderson's attempt to relate central events in the Book of Mormon to Joseph's "severe personality disorder."

Howard K. Harper, clinical director of the Behavioral Health Center in Idaho Falls, Idaho, and David P. and Steven C. Harper bring various disciplines to bear in reviewing Richard S. Van Wagoner's *Sidney Rigdon: A Portrait of Religious Excess*. While recognizing that this award-winning biography "is undoubtedly the best to date," they find it "fundamentally, not simply tangentially, defective." In diagnosing Rigdon with manic depression, Van Wagoner inaccurately "caricatur[es] Rigdon's long, varied life in a clinical profile." Finding the author's evidence problematic, and arguing that what he declares to be "a classic bout of manic-depressive illness" was in fact recurrent malaria, the Harpers conclude that in his "zeal to expose Rigdon's warts and double chins," Van Wagoner probably "added appendages that the important and still elusive Rigdon never had."

David L. Paulsen, a professor of philosophy at BYU, introduces the section on *The New Mormon Challenge* by assessing how well the book meets its stated aims. He finds most of those aims to be "refreshing." In regard to the aim "to retard the growth and progress of the [church] by disproving or otherwise discrediting its beliefs," Paulsen finds the book "strikingly at odds with [its] additional goal of engaging Latter-day Saints in a genuine and fruitful dialogue" and characterizes it as an anti-Mormon book. Despite the book's limitations—especially its failure to identify LDS beliefs—he is "impressed with the quality of the critiques" and

their courteous approach. However, he concludes: "I do not get the impression from reading *The New Mormon Challenge* that the editors and contributors are even open to the *possibility* of learning anything from us, especially pertaining to Christian doctrine or theology. . . . How [do] they expect [the book] to generate fruitful dialogue?"

Benjamin I. Huff, a Ph.D. candidate in philosophy at the University of Notre Dame, and Kent P. Jackson, a BYU professor of ancient scripture, both review the article "Is Mormonism Christian?" by Craig L. Blomberg. Huff faults Blomberg for concluding Mormonism is not Christian without addressing the "question in its most relevant and important sense," namely, whether or not Latter-day Saints accept Christ by repenting and striving to live his teachings. Blomberg points to "major contradictions of fundamental doctrinal issues between historic Christianity and official LDS teaching," but Huff contends that such a position involves "extrabiblical assumptions" and hence "begs the question" of whether Latter-day Saints believe the Bible. Huff argues that LDS belief and practice are quite consistent with Blomberg's own definition of what it means to be a Christian.

Jackson points out that "my friend Craig L. Blomberg concludes with regret that I cannot be a Christian because I exercise my faith within the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and sincerely believe all its teachings." Jackson argues that in order to say he is not Christian, the authors of *The New Mormon Challenge* must either deny the reality of his own conversion experience or "insist that salvation does not come through Jesus after all. . . . If I have been transformed through Jesus . . . but am nonetheless not saved because I believe the teachings of Mormonism, then [for them] salvation is not in Jesus but in correct thinking." Therefore "they must . . . assert that my relationship with Jesus is not real. But I won't let them do that. I can testify of the redeeming power of the atonement because I am a witness of it in my own life and in the lives of people I love."

The *Review* also contains an index to last year's two issues of the *Review*. To obtain a copy, use the enclosed mail-order form or visit the bookstore section of the FARMS Web site. 

25 September 2002: BYU professors John W. Welch (law) and John F. Hall (classics) reported on projects involving the Institute's Early Christianity Initiative. Welch spoke of a presentation he gave in Berlin to the International Society of Biblical Literature in which he showed the results of an Institute team's digital imaging of a dozen early New Testament manuscripts. He also described imaging projects involving (1) a large collection of early manuscripts damaged during World War II (among them are eighth- and ninth-century copies of the Pauline epistles, including a rare copy of an apocryphal epistle of Paul to the Laodiceans); and (2) the Freer collection of biblical codices held in the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. Welch and Hall then showcased their latest publication, *Charting the New Testament*, a book designed to illuminate the historical and cultural backgrounds and other interesting aspects of the New Testament.

16 October: BYU associate professor Daniel C. Peterson (Islamic studies) discussed the concept of Allah, a topic he addressed in a recent article for the *Encyclopedia of the Qur'an*. Peterson focused on several personal observations that did not figure in the article: that distortions of Islamic belief in Allah are foisted upon the American public by top-selling books; that the Qur'an, the *Ahadith* (oral sayings attributed to Muhammad), and early Islamic thinkers support an anthropomorphic view of God that was expunged from later Islamic thought; that creation *ex nihilo* is not in the Qur'an yet is a fundamental tenet of Islam; and that Muslims do not believe in human free will because it would deny the absolute sovereignty of Allah. 

CALL FOR PAPERS

The Institute invites interested persons to submit papers for a conference on Latter-day Saint views on the sacrifice of Isaac. The conference will be held at BYU on 11 October 2003.

Papers should deal with some aspect of the sacrifice of Isaac as recorded in Genesis 22 and should reflect close readings of scriptural texts and appropriate use of relevant outside material. Examples of broad topics include but are not limited to typology of the sacrifice of Isaac, literary devices in the account, historical background of the sacrifice, and LDS use of the account.

Conference participants will be encouraged to use visual aids to enhance their lecture format, and those who do so should use PowerPoint only. Assistance with PowerPoint presentations will be available.

Detailed outlines are due 31 January 2003 and should be sent to Book of Abraham Conference, c/o Institute for the Study and Preservation of Ancient Religious Texts, WAIH, Provo, UT 84602. Electronic submissions should be sent to bookofabraham@byu.edu. Watch for further details.

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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.

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