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# Insights

A WINDOW ON THE ANCIENT WORLD VOLUME 22 | 2002

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## Digitization of Herculaneum Papyri Completed

BYU and Institute personnel recently traveled to Naples, Italy, to mark the completion of an Institute team's work of digitally imaging 1,600 papyrus scrolls from the ancient city of Herculaneum. On 4 June the Institute's Steve Booras, who supervised the team, and M. Gerald Bradford, associate executive director of the Institute, joined BYU professor Roger T. Macfarlane, the principal investigator of the Herculaneum papyri project, in presenting the final set of CDs containing the digitized images to Mauro Giancaspro, director of the library in Naples (the Biblioteca Nazionale di Napoli) where the Herculaneum papyri are housed. They also presented a plaque commemorating the completion of the imaging.

Three days later, at the dedication ceremony of the library's new Office of Papyri, an event attended by top scholars, Booras and Macfarlane were honored for their successful efforts to image the papyri and to create an electronic archive of them. They in turn were presented with a plaque of appreciation for their

work, which is expected to help advance international research on the papyri by facilitating scholarly access to the superior images.

The work of imaging, accomplished in two phases over one and a half years, yielded more than 30,000 high-quality images of the scrolls. Many of the images made previously illegible and even unseen text (the scrolls were carbonized by the eruption of Vesuvius in A.D. 79) easily readable, to the delight of scholars. (For full reports on this project, see the February 1999 and July and November 2000 issues of *INSIGHTS*.)

The next step in the project, says Macfarlane, who chairs the Department of Humanities, Classics, and Comparative Literature at BYU, is to electronically stitch the images together for continuity in the text and then to work with the Biblioteca Nazionale and the International Center for the Study of the Herculaneum Papyri to publish and distribute the results. He estimates that some 100 scholars in Europe and the United States are working on the Herculaneum papyri but anticipates that "the release of these digital images will generate renewed interest in Herculaneum papyri research." 

## Doctrine of Exaltation Squares with Early Christian Belief

In 1998 Jordan Vajda wrote a remarkable master's thesis at the Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology in Berkeley, California, entitled "Partakers of the Divine Nature': A Comparative Analysis of Patristic and Mormon Doctrines of Divinization." The thesis is remarkable both for what it has to say and, perhaps even more strikingly, for who is saying it: Jordan Vajda is a Dominican Catholic priest. At the present time, he serves in the Catholic campus ministry at the Newman Center adjacent to the University of Washington in Seattle.

The Institute is pleased to offer Father Vajda's thesis as the latest publication in the FARMS *Occasional Papers* series (see the enclosed order form).

"The underlying motive for this thesis," Father Vajda states in the new introduction that he has written for FARMS, "was my . . . perception that one connection between the Catholic Church and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints lay in the fact that those who sought to deny the label 'Christian' to the LDS Church were, more often than not, the very same people who would then turn around and attempt to deny this label to the Catholic Church—with the same reasons often being used in both instances to justify the conclusion. And since it was easy

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## Egyptian Writing on Gold “Plates”

A recent issue of a popular journal on ancient Egypt discusses a number of sheets of gold foil incised with Egyptian writing.<sup>1</sup> These artifacts provide some interesting parallels to the Book of Mormon.

The sheets of gold foil come from the inside of a coffin found in 1907 in Tomb 55 of the Valley of the Kings, near Luxor, Egypt. A single inscription runs through all the foil sheets and is legible despite folds and wrinkles. The inscription reads: “The King of Upper and Lower Egypt who lives on truth, lord of the two lands [name missing] the son of the living solar disk which is here who lives forever.”<sup>2</sup> The text and archaeological artifacts found in the tomb date this find to the Amarna period in Egypt and, more specifically, between the reigns of Akhenaten and Tutankhamun (1351–1333 B.C.), or a little before the time of Moses and the Exodus.

While this inscription is certainly an example of Egyptian writing engraved on gold “plates,” it differs from the Book of Mormon plates in significant ways besides the obvious differences in content. The foil was part of the gilded decoration of a *rishi*-style (feather-decorated) coffin and is comparable to the gilded-foil inscriptions found on the furniture in the tomb of Queen Hetepheres, the mother of Cheops (ca. 2600 B.C.). It was common in ancient Egypt for royal coffins to be


overlaid with gilded strips containing inscriptions, which, because of their gold, were highly prized by tomb robbers. One ancient tomb robber described entering a tomb:

We opened the sarcophagi and the coffins that were in them, and we found the noble mummy of this king, equipped with a dagger [literally “scimitar”],<sup>3</sup> a great number of amulets and jewelry of gold about his neck, his mask of gold upon him, the noble mummy of this king was entirely covered with gold, while his coffin was overlaid with gold and silver inside and out, and inlaid with all manner of precious stones. We stripped the gold which we found on this noble mummy of this god along with his amulets and jewelry that was about his neck and the coffin in which they lay.<sup>4</sup>

The gold overlays described in that account are of the same type as those found in Tomb 55 of the Valley of the Kings. Although such funerary inscriptions clearly differ from the Book of Mormon plates in format and use, the two records share interesting parallels:

- *Egyptian writing on gold plates.*
- *Scimitars in use in the ancient Near East.* Some critics of the Book of Mormon have claimed that “the cimenter [was only] a Turkish weapon, not known until after the time of Mohommed [*sic*].”<sup>5</sup> Research has demonstrated, however, that scimitars were known in

the ancient Near East at least as early as the Late Bronze Age, several hundred years before the time of Lehi.<sup>6</sup>

While neither of these discoveries is new in and of itself, it is interesting to find both in confluence and to note their parallels to the Book of Mormon. 

### Notes

1. Dennis Forbes, “Cairo Museum in Possession of a Quantity of Gold Foil Which Once Partially Lined the Lid of the Coffin from KV55,” *KMT: A Modern Journal of Ancient Egypt* 12 (summer 2001): 19–25.
2. My translation of the original Egyptian is based on the photos in *ibid.*, 22–23. The line drawings accompanying the photos are inaccurate.
3. The Egyptian word *ḥpšy* is probably a variant of the well-attested Egyptian word *ḥpš*, “scimitar.”
4. My translation of P. Leopold-Amherst 2/12–16 (labeled 2/3–7) in T. Eric Peet, *The Great Tomb-Robberies of the Twentieth Egyptian Dynasty* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1930), plate V. To account for archaeological details, my renditions of certain words differ from those given in some dictionaries.
5. Samuel Hawthornthwaite, *Mr. Hawthornthwaite’s Adventures among the Mormons, as an Elder during Eight Years* (Manchester: Samuel Hawthornthwaite, 1857), 69.
6. See Paul Y. Hoskisson, “Scimitars, Cimenter! We Have Scimitars! Do We Need Another Cimenter?” in *Wanjare in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 353.

By John Gee

## Hugh Nibley Audiotope Collection


FARMS has released volumes 3, 4, and 5 of an ongoing audiotope collection of essays titled *Preparing for the Millennium*, by renowned Latter-day Saint scholar Hugh W. Nibley. Read by Lloyd D. Newell, the audiotapes feature four essays from Nibley's *Approaching Zion* and three essays from another volume in his collected works, *The Prophetic Book of Mormon*.

Volume 3 contains two essays, "Law of Consecration" and "The Meaning of the Atonement," which emphasize that the law of consecration is an "eternal order" and explain how the atonement can help prepare us to live this law and fulfill our eternal obligations. Exploring meanings of the word *atonement* in Semitic languages, he points out, for instance, that the Arabic word *kafara* "puts the emphasis on a tight squeeze," providing "the imagery of the atonement, the embrace."

In "Scriptural Perspectives on How to Survive the Calamities of the Last Days," "The Prophetic Book of

Mormon," and "Last Call: An Apocalyptic Warning from the Book of Mormon" in volume 4, Nibley explores how the Book of Mormon serves as both an example and a warning of the destruction that will accompany the last days. Comparing the sins of the modern world with the sins of the people of Zarahemla, Nibley warns, "God is not going to put up with it; he is withdrawing his protection. . . . Why do you think such great pains and sufferings have been experienced to get the message of the Book of Mormon to us?"

In volume 5, Nibley contends in his essays "Work We Must, but the Lunch Is Free" and "But What Kind of Work?" that "an idler in the Lord's book is one who is not working for the building up of the kingdom of God . . . no matter how hard he may be working to satisfy his own greed." He goes on to explain that God will take care of all of those who devote their lives to establishing his kingdom on earth rather than fulfilling their own worldly needs.

For purchasing information, see the enclosed order form or visit the FARMS Web site at [farms.byu.edu](http://farms.byu.edu). 

### Publications Staff Welcomes New Editor

Joining the Institute's publications team is editor and writer Larry E. Morris. Larry began his career at the *Ensign* magazine in 1978, where he worked for more than five years. His work in many additional editorial capacities has included four years with McGraw-Hill and eight years as managing editor of one of Novell's technical magazines. An avid student of history and a keen researcher, Larry has authored two books on Mormon history and is writing another on the lives of Lewis and Clark and their group of explorers after their famous expedition.

Larry earned B.A. degrees in English and philosophy, and later an M.A. in American literature, from BYU. Originally from Idaho Falls, Idaho, he lives in Salt Lake City with his wife, Deborah. They are the parents of four children. Larry is enthusiastic about the Institute's work and claims, "If I had my pick of any place to work, I would still choose FARMS because of its mission to strengthen faith and enhance understanding of the scriptures."

## Exaltation continued from page 1

enough for me to see through the many half-truths, misunderstandings, and even outright errors alleged against the Catholic Church, I suspected that similar critiques leveled against the LDS Church—as to its 'non-Christian' status—were equally flawed." Accordingly, he decided that he "wanted to reach beyond the rhetoric and discover for [himself] what the LDS Church actually taught," in the hope of encouraging responsible and accurate interfaith dialogue.

"I firmly maintain," writes Father Vajda, "that the Latter-day Saints are owed a debt of gratitude by other Christians because the Saints remind us all of our divine potential. The historic Christian doctrine of salvation—theosis, i.e., human divinization—for too long has been forgotten by too many Christians." "Members of the LDS Church," he promises near the beginning of his thesis, "will discover unmistakable evidence that their fundamental belief about human salvation and potential is not unique nor a Mormon

invention. Latin Catholics and Protestants will learn of a doctrine of salvation that, while relatively foreign to their ears, is nevertheless part of the heritage of the undivided Catholic Church of the first millennium. Members of Eastern Orthodox and Eastern Catholic Churches will discover on the American continent an amazing parallel to their own belief that salvation in Christ involves our becoming ‘partakers of the divine nature.’”

In his concluding paragraph, alluding to a piece of inflammatory anti-Mormon propaganda from the early 1980s, Father Vajda observes that “the Mormons are truly ‘godmakers’: as the [LDS] doctrine of exaltation explains, the fullness of human salvation means ‘becoming a god.’ Yet what was meant to be a term of ridicule has turned out to be a term of approbation, for the witness of the Greek Fathers of the Church . . . is that they also believed that salvation meant ‘becoming a god.’ It seems that if one’s soteriology cannot accommodate a doctrine of human divinization, then it has at least implicitly, if not explicitly, rejected the heritage of the early Christian church and departed from the faith of first millennium Christianity. However, if that is the case, those who would espouse such a soteriology also believe, in fact, that Christianity, from about the second century on, has apostatized and ‘gotten it wrong’ on this core issue of human salvation. Thus, ironically, those who would excoriate Mormons for believing in the doctrine of exaltation actually agree with them that the early church experienced a ‘great apostasy’ on fundamental doctrinal questions. And the supreme irony is that such persons should probably investigate the claims of the LDS Church, which proclaims that within itself is to be found the ‘restoration of all things.’”

**By Daniel C. Peterson**

#### SPECIAL BOOK OFFER

For a limited time, FARMS subscribers can obtain at special discount the first two volumes of the Book of Mormon critical text: *The Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon: Typographical Facsimile of the Extant Text* and *The Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon: Typographical Facsimile of the Entire Text in Two Parts*, published by FARMS in 2001 (see the order form). For a full report on these essential resources for serious study of the Book of Mormon text, see the lead article in *INSIGHTS* 21/5 (2002).

Mailed with this newsletter is *Uncovering the Original Text of the Book of Mormon: History and Findings of the Critical Text Project*. This expanded report of the 20 October 2001 FARMS symposium on the Book of Mormon Critical Text Project replaces one of this year’s two planned issues of the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*. Well illustrated and informative, this special report serves as a primer for the critical text project.

# Insights

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Preservation of Ancient Religious Texts**  
Brigham Young University

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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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