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Insights

A WINDOW ON THE ANCIENT WORLD VOLUME 22 | 2002

Number 8

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First Volumes in New METI Series Published

The Institute's Middle Eastern Texts Initiative has published the first two volumes in its Graeco-Arabic Sciences and Philosophy series: Moses Maimonides' *On Asthma* and Averroës' *Middle Commentary on Aristotle's De anima*.

Originally written in 1190, *On Asthma* is the first volume of a sponsored subseries titled the Complete Medical Works of Moses Maimonides. The new edition, translated by Dr. Gerrit Bos of the Martin Buber Institute for Judaic Studies at the University of Cologne, in Germany, uses both the original Arabic text and the English translation to present Maimonides' treatment of asthma. Throughout the prescribed regimens and lifestyle changes for his patients, Maimonides provides a unique and practical glimpse of how medieval physicians viewed ancient medicine.

"*On Asthma* is particularly exciting because of its continued relevance today," said Glen Cooper, an Institute researcher who directs the Graeco-Arabic

Sciences and Philosophy series. "We still don't have a cure for asthma, and Maimonides focused on alleviating the symptoms rather than providing the cure, much as we do now."

The Maimonides series will eventually comprise about 13 volumes and will provide a rare complete reference to the medical works of the eminent medieval Jewish rabbi. Those particular works have been influential but never previously available in a complete or reliable form.

Middle Commentary on Aristotle's De anima was originally written by Averroës (1126–1198), the greatest Aristotelian of the Islamic philosophical tradition. Averroës' work proved critical to the dissemination of the Aristotelian tradition in Europe, and his direct influence can be found in the work of many leading scholars of the time, including Thomas Aquinas.

The new edition was translated, with notes, by Dr. Alfred Ivry of New York University.

Middle Commentary represents a sophisticated yet clear view of a powerful but often complicated

continued on page 4

Scholars Speak at FAIR Conference

Scholars from BYU spoke at the recent FAIR (Foundation for Apologetic Information and Research) LDS Apologetics Conference held in August at Utah Valley State College, in Orem, Utah. FAIR, which is not affiliated with BYU or the Institute, is an organization dedicated to defending LDS beliefs and practices with sound scholarship. The theme of the conference was "Turning Stumbling Blocks to Stepping Stones: Responding to Challenging Issues in Mormonism."

John A. Tvedtnes, a resident scholar with the Institute, addressed the topic "The Mistakes of Men:

Can the Scriptures Be Error-Free?" He noted that critics often attack the Book of Mormon on issues that would similarly be damaging to the Bible. "Since most of our critics are Bible-reading Christians, I believe that the best approach is to use the Bible as much as possible in our responses."

One example is that the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon apparently refers to King Benjamin as still being alive (in Mosiah 21:28 and Ether 4:1) after his death had already been recorded (in Mosiah 6:5). Possible explanations include a scribal error by Moroni, Mormon, or someone else. Interestingly, the Bible has a similar difficulty in 1 Kings 15:6, which mentions "war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam" after Rehoboam had already died. This also could have

continued on page 3

Hiding the Secret Plans

The *Second Conference of Abbot Serenus* 21, written about A.D. 426 by the Christian scholar John Cassian, sheds light on statements made in the Book of Mormon and the Book of Moses about Cain, who slew his brother Abel.

An Old World contemporary of Mormon and Moroni, Cassian wrote that “the sons of Seth who were the sons of God saw the daughters of those who were born of the line of Cain, and inflamed with the desire for their beauty took to themselves from them wives who taught their husbands the wickedness of their fathers, and at once led them astray from their innate holiness and the single-mindedness of their forefathers.”¹

In the Book of Mormon, Cain and his descendants are said to have covenanted with Satan to organize the first of the secret combinations that later flourished among the Jaredites and the Nephites (see Helaman 6:27; Ether 8:15). The most well known of those groups was called “Gadianton’s robbers and murderers” (Helaman 6:18). The devil was considered to be the founder of such “secret combinations of murder” (see 2 Nephi 9:9; 26:22). According to Helaman 8:28, the “secret band” among the Nephites was authored by “Gadianton and the evil one who seeketh to destroy the souls of men.” The Book of Moses confirms the devil’s role and provides more details about


the oaths and secrecy associated with Cain’s family (see Moses 5:29–31, 49–52).

Cassian continues his account by providing additional material not found in the Bible but confirmed in the Book of Mormon:

And so, as ancient traditions tell us, Ham the son of Noah, who had been taught these superstitions and wicked and profane arts, as he knew that he could not possibly bring any handbook on these subjects into the ark, into which he was to enter with his good father and holy brothers, inscribed these nefarious arts and profane devices on plates of various metals which could not be destroyed by the flood of waters, and on hard rocks, and when the flood was over he hunted for them with the same inquisitiveness with which he had concealed them, and so transmitted to his descendants a seedbed of profanity and perpetual sin. In this way then that common notion, according to which men believe that angels delivered to men enchantments and diverse arts, is in truth fulfilled. From these sons of Seth then and daughters of Cain, as we have said, there were born still worse children who became mighty, hunters, violent and most fierce men who were termed giants by reason of the size of their bodies and their cruelty and wickedness.²

The keeping of records on metal plates is a major theme in the Book of Mormon, but equally significant is Cassian’s assertion that Ham had learned the “wicked and profane arts” of Cain and had inscribed them on metallic plates that he hid before the flood and later retrieved. The story is paralleled by the account of the Gadianton robbers, who “concealed their secret plans in the earth” and later retrieved them (see Helaman 11:10, 26).

A medieval Jewish text that comments on the building of the Tower of Babel (see Genesis 11:2) indicates that the people of that time “found remnants of the secret wisdom that had been left there by the generation of the Flood, and with that they made their attempt to provoke the Holy One, blessed be He” (Zohar Genesis 76a).³

Although we cannot ascertain what were the “ancient traditions” and “secret wisdom” to which Cassian and the Zohar referred, it is interesting that the account parallels those found in two books of scripture that came to us through a modern prophet, Joseph Smith. 

Notes

1. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series (1894; reprint, Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1995), 11:383.
2. *Ibid.*, 11:384.
3. Harry Sperling and Maurice Simon, trans., *The Zohar* (New York: Rebecca Benet Publications, 1958), 1:259.

By John A. Tvedtnes

Conference continued from page 1

reflected a scribal error, and a few Hebrew manuscripts correct the text to read “war between Abijah the son of Rehoboam and Jeroboam.”

Some critics also argue that the Bible has been verified by archaeologists while no Book of Mormon cities have been identified in the New World. Tvedtnes pointed out, however, that archaeology related to the Bible is not at all cut and dried, with some archaeologists arguing they can find little or no support for the Bible. In addition, identification of various sites often involves speculation. In the last century, for example, three different archaeological sites have been identified as the biblical city of Debir, which was conquered by Joshua, with the most recent identification coming in the late 1970s.

In his conclusion, Tvedtnes noted that the Bible, “which most of our critics accept as inerrant scripture, has the same kinds of perceived ‘problems’ as those the critics find in the Book of Mormon. A few of those problems have already been solved for the Bible with the passage of time. Fairness and logic dictate that we give the Book of Mormon the same benefit of the doubt.”

Visualizing Isaiah Wins Printing Award

In June 2002 the International Publishing Management Association (IMPA) and *In-Plant Graphics* magazine awarded the BYU Press third place for Donald W. Parry’s *Visualizing Isaiah*, in the category of full-color projects. In this prestigious international competition, the largest of its kind in the world, corporate publishing facilities such as Boeing, Purdue University, and the World Bank Group compete for awards in a variety of categories.

Visualizing Isaiah is designed to help modern readers understand the imagery in the book of Isaiah. The full-color images give visual examples of the symbols used by Isaiah. Donald Parry believes that this award reflects the excellence of the press in presenting the photographs, maps, and illustrations. “In fact,” he says, “several people who have acquired the book have commented on the quality of the images.”

Royal Skousen, a BYU professor of linguistics and editor of the Book of Mormon Critical Text Project, spoke on changes in the Book of Mormon text. He first reviewed the history and findings of the critical text project (a topic covered in detail in his article in the recent FARMS publication *Uncovering the Original Text of the Book of Mormon*). Next, he noted that changes in the Book of Mormon text over the years fall into three categories: (1) the referencing system (chapters and verses); (2) accidents, such as paragraphing, spelling, and punctuation; and (3) substantives, which are changes in words, forms of words, phrases, and sentences—including removal of archaic King James Version language and inclusion of text clarifications. “In every case, the original text could be restored without any problem, or Joseph Smith’s clarifications could be kept,” Skousen said.

“Errors have crept into the Book of Mormon, but no errors significantly interfere with either the message of the book or its doctrine,” Skousen concluded. “These textual errors have never prevented readers of the book from receiving their own personal witness of its truth. In fact, errors have been helpful in studying the Book of Mormon text. We have discovered how systematic the original text is because the occasional error has created an exception in phraseology. How many other cases of systematic phraseology have not yet been discovered because the transmission has been error-free? The errors in transmission actually help us!

“Further, all this worry over the number of changes in the Book of Mormon is specious. There are many more variants per word in the New Testament text and many more highly debated variants than in the Book of Mormon text. Does this variation mean that the New Testament is false—that it is not God’s word because humans have made errors in its transmission? The word of God still comes through despite the occasional errors in transmission.”

Daniel C. Peterson, associate professor of Islamic studies and Arabic at BYU, demonstrated how anti-Mormon explanations of the Book of Mormon have evolved through the years without a single, unified theory ever emerging.

An early theory regarded Joseph Smith as the sole author of the Book of Mormon, even though he was regarded as a “superstitious and ignorant peasant,” Peterson said. Before long however, critics

who recognized the power of the Book of Mormon text suggested that Joseph had help from educated people, most notably Solomon Spaulding, who had innocently authored a religious romance, and Sidney Rigdon, a supposed coconspirator who helped Joseph transform the Spaulding manuscript into the Book of Mormon. "This theory dominated skeptical explanations of the Book of Mormon for fifty years," Peterson said.

Fawn Brodie "effectively sounded the death knell of the Spaulding Theory, arguing instead that Joseph Smith was the consciously fraudulent author of the book, which reflected his own personality and environment. The dull village idiot was now 'a mythmaker of prodigious talents.'" This same idea is manifest in the recent publication *American Apocrypha*. "While the authors all seem to agree, broadly, that Joseph Smith was the sole or principal author of the Book of Mormon, there are notable disagreements about the how and the why."

For example, one essay depicts Joseph "as a rather cunning and deliberate fraud" while another maintains that Joseph employed "automatic writing" to produce the book and that he was therefore "dissociative but sincere." Peterson argued, however, that the various theories put forth in the book do not support each other. "Mutually contradictory accounts are not mutually reinforcing. Quite the contrary—they weaken each other."

Seven other people spoke at the two-day conference. Topics included Joseph Smith's 1826 trial, plural marriage, the Gadianton band in the Book of Mormon, and the impact of Mormon critics on LDS scholarship. ❏

METI Series continued from page 1

biological treatise on the soul or life force of living things, including plants, and the mysteries of life associated with them. Of Averroës' three commentaries on *De anima*, his *Middle Commentary* is of medium length and scope, hence its title.

This new volume provides the modern reader with an accurate and accessible historical window to Aristotle's work as it was interpreted and transmitted in the medieval period.

The Graeco-Arabic Sciences and Philosophy series, which was organized in 2000, is dedicated to the publication of bilingual editions and translations of significant scientific and philosophical works from the Arabic intellectual tradition. Future projects include the continuation of the Maimonides series and research of ancient Arabic commentary on the work and treatises of Galen. ❏

Insights

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ISL-02B	<i>Maimonides On Asthma</i> , Gerrit Bos, 326 pp., hardbound. Retail \$34.95		\$27.95	

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