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The Newsletter of
the Foundation for
Ancient Research
& Mormon Studies

INSIGHTS

AN ANCIENT WINDOW

October 1995

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

Elder L. Tom Perry Examines the Personalities Involved in the Translation of the Book of Mormon and in the Restoration of the Church

In his address to the friends and supporters of FARMS at the Foundation's 1995 annual banquet, Elder L. Tom Perry of the Quorum of the Twelve expressed his interest in the human chemistry found in organizations and examined the early history of the Church from this perspective. He spoke of the challenges that Joseph Smith faced as a young husband with a skeptical father-in-law who thought Joseph should be doing something more productive than sitting around the house translating golden plates. He reflected on the challenges that Martin Harris faced in helping to finance the work on the Book of Mormon; the sadness that accompanied the loss of the manuscript and the consequent removal of the plates for a time; Oliver Cowdery's excitement over helping with the translation, as the Lord provided a scribe; and the miraculous speed of the translation, compared to the time required for the translation of other works of scripture, such as the King James Version of the Bible.

Elder Perry then turned his attention to describing the first three prophets of the Restora-

tion, especially the differences in their personalities developed by the different family and social circumstances in which the Lord placed them. He described how these different traits served the Church well at different points in its history—showing how the human chemistry of the organization was engineered by the

Lord for his divine purposes. (Copies of Elder Perry's remarks may be obtained using the enclosed order form.)

Elder Perry entertained us with his good humor, lifted us with the spiritual power of his witness, and challenged us to "use your research to bring the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

Review Continues Picks and Pans

The most highly recommended item in the latest *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* (volume 7, number 2) is not a single book but a resource library of books on CD-ROM, the *LDS Collectors Edition* from Infobases. Editor Daniel Peterson gives it three stars (out of a possible four stars) for its usefulness to the student of the scriptures, and reviewer Larry K. Smith calls it a "quantum leap forward" for study and research on the scriptures and related topics because it brings together such a large quantity of good books at such a low price (less than 20¢ a book in the 1995 edition), along with good search capabilities and options for individualizing the material.

Receiving less favorable review is *Decker's Complete Handbook on Mormonism*, which Peterson describes as "not . . . an indescribably horrid book . . . merely a very, very bad one." *Mormonism*, by Jan Shipps, originally published ten years ago, before the *Review* began, receives retrospective attention from Louis Midgley. He finds that despite its strengths, it is inadequate in its treatment of the Book of Mormon.

The table of contents of this issue of the *Review* is as follows:

Overview of the Book of Mormon, reviewed by Larry K. Smith

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The Foundation for
Ancient Research
& Mormon Studies

FARMS UPDATE

A Report on Research in Progress

Number 102

Benjamin's Tower and Old Testament Pillars

WHILE SCHOLARS ARE uncertain about the precise nature of the 'ammud¹ (see August 1995 *Insights*), it is clear that it was something other than a pillar. Roland deVaux imagines the king "standing on a pedestal" where presumably he worshipped God.² Gerhard von Rad, commenting on the pillars in 2 Kings, sees them as some kind of high, narrow platform:

The king would have had to be visible to the crowd which had gathered for the solemnities, so that one may probably think of some sort of pillar-like platform.³

The biblical Hebrew literally says that the king or priestly leader stood on a "standing thing." Only later did the Greek LXX translation promote the specific idea that the 'ammud was precisely a pillar (*stylos*). Thus, once again King Benjamin's text is consistent with the broader Hebrew term, which can easily refer to any kind of platform or, indeed, to a tower.

Moreover, scholars are uncertain about the purpose of the 'ammud. Kraus speculates that the king was lifted onto the platform in order to receive "the homage of the congregation."⁴ But a careful reexamination of the Bible finds that the 'ammud always stood in or by the temple as the king or leader officiated at times of coronation, lawgiving,

covenant renewal, or temple dedication. Thus Geo Widengren has insightfully concluded:

At least towards the end of the pre-exilic period, but possibly from the beginning of that period, the king when reading to his people on a solemn occasion from the book of the law and acting as the mediator of the covenant making between Yahweh and the people had his place on a platform or a dais.⁵

Accordingly, the use of the tower by King Benjamin was especially pertinent, inasmuch as his speech involved so many of these elements of an ancient Israelite solemn assembly: a coronation proclamation (Mosiah 2:30), a stipulation of covenant between the new king and the people (Mosiah 2:31), a renewal of the basic covenant between God and the people (Mosiah 5:5), and the consecration of the king and appointment of priests (Mosiah 6:3). Thus again, the biblical texts give a picture whose focus is sharpened by the Book of Mormon text.

Reflection on Benjamin's tower draws another possible connection to mind. The word 'ammud is used in other Old Testament texts to describe the pillar of light (or fire) and the pillar of cloud that stood before the Tabernacle, signaling God's presence at that holy sanctuary. Is it possible

that Benjamin's tower, standing beside the temple of Zarahemla, in turn signified the pillar of God's presence? If so, does this explain why Benjamin was so careful at the beginning of his speech to disclaim any implication that he was "more than a mortal man" (Mosiah 2:10; cf. 2:26)?

The tower built by Benjamin was evidently more than just a way to communicate to the people. It was a rich, symbolic part of ancient Israelite tradition in which the king stood on a platform at the temple to officiate between God and his people.

Notes

1. T. R. Hobbs, *2 Kings*, vol. 13 of *Word Biblical Commentary* (1985), 142, is "uncertain" but suggests "some kind of column, podium, or platform."
2. Roland deVaux, *Ancient Israel* (1965), 1:102-3.
3. Gerhard von Rad, "The Royal Ritual in Judah," in *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays*, trans. E. W. Trueman Dicken (1966), 222.
4. H. J. Kraus, *Worship in Israel*, trans. Geoffrey Buswell (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1966), 224.
5. Geo Widengren, "King and Covenant," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 2 (1957): 10; it should also be noted that in modern Judaism the torah is to be read from a raised platform called a *bimah* which is to be placed in the center of the synagogue. Some have connected this structure with the platforms in the temples. See "Bimah," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (1973), 4:1002-6.
6. H. Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods* (1948), 245-46.

Based on research by John W. Welch, Terry L. Szink, and others.

*New FARMS publications***Book of Mormon Series Offers Five New Lectures**

The following lectures, recently filmed and broadcast as part of the FARMS Book of Mormon Lecture Series, are now available for you to enjoy (videos, audiocassettes, or transcripts—see the order form).

The lecture series brings some of the best lectures on the Book of Mormon into your home or classroom. Because this series has been supported by generous donations, we are able to bring it to you very inexpensively.

Susan Easton Black, "Father Lehi: A Visionary Man"

In this lecture, Susan Black, professor of Church History and Doctrine at BYU, takes us through Lehi's dream of the tree of life in 1 Nephi 8. As patriarch of his family, Lehi received visions to bless his posterity, but some of his sons exercised their agency unwisely and did not heed him; still, Lehi tenderly counseled his sons. Lehi teaches us how to be better parents and children and gives patriarchal counsel to parents whose children, by their actions, may bring upon themselves the consequence of being "cast out of the Lord's presence."

E. Dale LeBaron, "The Savior's Ministry to the Nephites: A Millennial Prototype"

Dale LeBaron, associate professor of Church History and Doctrine at BYU, shows parallels between the account in 3 Nephi of the Savior's visit to the Nephites and the prophecies in the Doctrine and Covenants about the Second Coming. He considers how the prophets' messages about the signs of the times forecast destruction but give hope to the prepared, giving five conditions for that preparedness. In the Book of Mormon, Christ provides a precious glimpse of millennial happiness.

Robert L. Millet, "The Destiny of the House of Israel"

What does it mean when Mormon says, "Know ye that ye are of the House of Israel"? In this lecture, Robert Millet, Dean of Religious Education at BYU, clarifies some misunderstandings about the House of Israel by giving seven points to remember when studying this covenant people. By studying the Book of Mormon, latter-day Israelites can better understand and live their covenants with God.

Daniel C. Peterson, "Experiment upon the Word"

Faith includes the light of understanding; commitment to keep covenants; trust; action; and growth, like a seed. Daniel Peterson, associate professor of Islamic Studies and Arabic at BYU, lectures on Alma's formula for developing and increasing faith, given in Alma 32. The formula involves leaps of faith, desire for understanding, trial, prayer, and actions. Those who follow Alma's formula "shall reap the rewards of their faith" and shall "taste the fruits of their labors" as the seed of faith grows within them.

Noel B. Reynolds, "The Political Context of the Book of Mormon"

Noel Reynolds, professor of Political Science at BYU, explains Nephi's position in the "political struggle" for the right to rule Lehi's descendants. Nephi's case is strong, showing how Laman and Lemuel gave up their rights because of their iniquities and accepted their brother's reign over them. The contrasting lifestyles of the two groups witness to the truth of Nephi's account.

*FARMS around the world***Videos Down Under**

Dennis Curyer of Australia reports that the effort to put FARMS videos into the format used there (see *Insights*, Sept. 1994) is going well and attracting attention from as far away as Germany, England, and Malaysia. New videos are being reformatted all the time. He can be reached through a new fax number—(03) 9739-5415—or by mail at P.O. Box 770, Lilydale, Vic., Australia 3140.

*In the mailbox***New Catalog Ready for You and Your Friends**

Enclosed in this mailing is the newest FARMS catalog, which we hope will be of use as you plan your Christmas giving. We are happy to make extra copies of the catalog available free for you to give to your friends. Just let us know how many you need—you are our best ambassadors.

Publicly speaking

Brown Bags Continue

Rocks, radar, and writers—these have been the topics of the most recent presentations at the FARMS brown bag seminar at BYU. John L. Sorenson, professor emeritus of Anthropology at BYU, spoke about writers, or more accurately, about the authorship of the Book of Mormon. He pointed out that Joseph Smith apparently thought that the Book of Mormon applied to all of North and South America, yet the book fits only a limited Mesoamerican setting. If Joseph had made up the setting or used what he knew about the world, it would not have matched so well a part of the world he apparently knew little or nothing about. If somehow he knew more about Mesoamerica than current evidence indicates, so that he could make the setting fit that part of the world, why would he himself then assume that it applied to a much larger geography? Sorenson also discussed how the book compares to Mesoamerican texts, making reference to a large variety of categories.

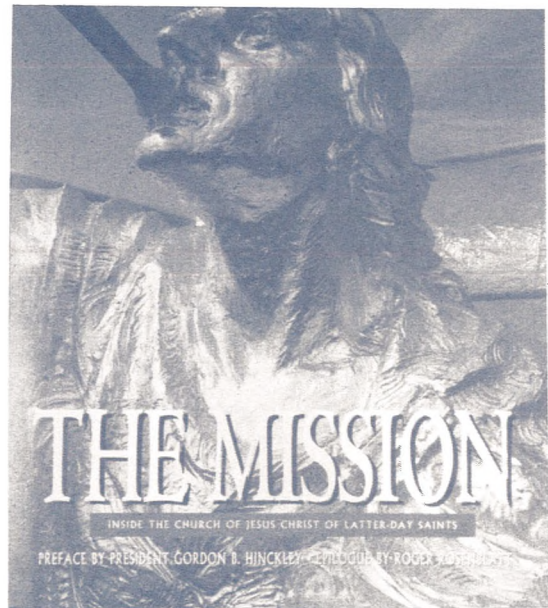
Douglas M. Chabries, Dean of Engineering and Technology at BYU, talked about radar, specifically synthetic aperture radar (SAR) and its potential uses in support of archaeology. SAR can penetrate (or “see through”) dry sand for as deep as thirty feet. Permission is being sought to use SAR in the area around the Dead Sea to look for caves that might be additional scroll repositories. Chabries also brought participants up to date on the use of multiple spectral imaging. Since inks fluoresce at different frequencies, shining the right frequency of light on a writing surface can make the ink fluoresce but not the surface (scroll, etc.) increasing our ability to read the writing.

Eugene E. Clark, a professional geologist with considerable experience in Arabia, reported on his FARMS-sponsored exploration of the mineralogy of the Dhofar region (see the preliminary report in the August *Insights*). While the samples he obtained were not of commercial quality, there was sufficient ore available in a form that could be used locally that the Dhofar region as a whole qualifies as a reasonable candidate for containing the site of Bountiful. From the standpoint of geology and geography, he saw no reason to prefer the Wadi Sayq over other possibilities in the region, although he acknowledged that he had not yet examined the other criteria put forward to support that site.

From other publishers

Lavish Photo Book Documents LDS Life

Time Warner has just published a beautiful book of photographs that gives the world a glimpse into the lives and beliefs of Latter-day Saints. *The Mission* contains the work of fifty world-class photographers who traveled extensively around the world in the course of a year, documenting the people, history, culture, rituals, and beliefs of the global Church. It was produced with considerable cooperation from the Church and includes a preface written by President



Gordon B. Hinckley. It is remarkably accurate for a work by outsiders and its tone is sympathetic to the beliefs and life-styles of members, reflecting no doubt the cooperation of the Church.

Overall the message of the book is that the Latter-day Saints are a people with a worthwhile way of life—perhaps the very message that Church leaders were hoping for when they decided to cooperate so extensively in its production.

This large-format, 224-page book contains more than 300 color and black-and-white photos. It retails for \$49.95; we are happy to be able to offer it to our readers at a 20% discount, at \$39.95. We hope that you will enjoy it and find it worthwhile—and that it may open some doors for discussions of the way of life engendered by the gospel.

*President's message***A New Home for FARMS**

About a year ago, Richard Winwood, recently returned mission president and strong FARMS supporter, was visiting the FARMS office to discuss some future projects. After an hour or so discussing a long list of proposed projects, he bluntly announced that FARMS's ability to fulfill its mission was being compromised by the limitations of its physical facilities.

I'll have to admit my own immediate reaction was to point out how generously the University had treated us in allowing us to move in a very few years from one room in the catacombs of the Law School basement to several adjacent offices in the old Amanda Knight Hall. In fact, if you add up all the rooms that we had managed to beg, borrow, or steal (using the old cliché advisedly), we had every reason to be extremely grateful. While FARMS furnished these offices and paid telephone and mail expenses, the University had never charged us a dime for the space, lights, or heat. Even though the rooms were in the lowest priority space, they were quite serviceable and of enormous importance to the fledgling foundation during a crucial growth period.

Over the next few days I returned several times to Brother Winwood's observation. Quickly, it dawned on me how right he was. While we had funding in place for a number of new projects, we were waiting for space to house the personnel to carry them out. Our growing publications effort was overwhelming the editorial staff, which had no room to expand. And, even more importantly, I could foresee important new services FARMS could offer to the LDS community and to BYU that would only be possible with significant dedicated space.

Over the next several months of deliberation with the FARMS Board of Directors and the BYU administration, it was decided that FARMS should build a new facility on or near campus. With generous seed money provided by Brother Winwood, we were able to purchase three older homes that occupy three-quarters of an acre of privately held land just off the south rim of the BYU campus. Fitzimmons Associates, a Salt Lake City architectural firm, is helping us to design a beautiful building to be constructed next year on that site.

In addition to providing improved and expanded work space, this building will enable

FARMS to provide new and unprecedented services. It will house a study center where students and friends of FARMS can find any materials they need for Book of Mormon research. It will also provide a large research display area where the thousands of visitors to BYU each year can see displayed the results of important scriptural research projects. A new distribution center will make it much easier for you to see new and existing publications displayed. A proper mailroom will facilitate the large volume of mail and phone orders for publications. And a media editing facility will simplify the preparation of an expanded offering of video and audio lectures. Finally, a small auditorium will provide a regular location for scriptural research presentations and support the needs of groups visiting the building.

We have already received some generous pledges of financial support for this new building, but much more is needed. We invite you to consider how such a building could boost research and education on the Book of Mormon and other scriptures and to consider how you might help. This is an exciting time for Book of Mormon studies, and we hope that you will join us in this venture.

Noel B. Reynolds

*Housekeeping***To Help with the FARMS Building Fund**

If you would like to make a tax-free contribution to the construction of our new FARMS building, you may indicate on the order form the way in which you wish to donate: either a cash donation or the pledge of a monthly amount. If these alternatives do not meet your needs but you wish to contribute in another way, you may discuss other options with Brent Hall at the FARMS office, by calling our toll-free number, 800-327-6715.

Donations of every size are appreciated. Your support has helped us to grow to the point that we need a new facility, and we look forward to serving you better in our new building.

Elder Perry Addresses Banquet (cont. from page 1)

light and life of the gospel to the peoples of the world," promising great blessings to those who do so. Many of the more than 400 people in attendance made new friends and renewed old acquaintances. For example, a couple from Medford, Oregon, gave each other an early anniversary present consisting of a trip to the FARMS banquet where they could see friends they made on the most recent FARMS tour to Israel. Another couple from Houston, Texas, explained that they had been introduced to FARMS by a friend in Houston and expressed their excitement about meeting other people who enjoy reading FARMS materials. A supporter from St. George, Utah, wanted to share what he had enjoyed here by taking many copies of the FARMS catalog to give to friends and neighbors.

Another highlight of the evening was a video presentation of the FARMS Year in Review for 1995 (copies are available at no charge; see the order form). It reviewed activities, presentations, and publications of the last year and previewed upcoming events and activities for 1995-96. The video also included the announcement that FARMS plans to construct a new building, beginning in the next year (see the president's message on page 5).

Latest Issue of Review (cont. from page 1)

First Nephi: Study Book of Mormon, reviewed by Larry K. Smith

Charles, Melodie Moench, "Book of Mormon Christology," reviewed by Martin S. Tanner

Decker, Ed, *Decker's Complete Handbook on Mormonism*, reviewed by Daniel C. Peterson

Epperson, Steven, *Mormons and Jews: Early Mormon Theologies of Israel*, reviewed by Frank F. Judd, Jr., and Terrence L. Szink

Marquardt, H. Michael, and Wesley P. Walters, *Inventing Mormonism: Tradition and the Historical Record*, reviewed by Larry C. Porter

Metcalf, Brent Lee, ed., *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology*, reviewed by Kevin Christensen

Shipps, Jan, *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition*, reviewed by Louis Midgley

Treat, Raymond C., ed., *Recent Book of Mormon Developments: Articles from the Zarahemla Record*, vol. 2, reviewed by Alison V. P. Coutts

LDS Collectors Edition CD-ROM, reviewed by Larry K. Smith

1994 Book of Mormon Bibliography, compiled by Daniel B. McKinlay

INSIGHTS

AN ANCIENT WINDOW

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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.

FARMS is a nonprofit educational foundation, independent of all other organizations. 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. As a service to teachers and students of the scriptures, research results are distributed both in 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.

Christmas gift idea

Make 1996 a Book of Mormon Year for Someone Special with an *Insights* Gift Subscription

The *Insights* newsletter is the best source for solid, reliable information about Book of Mormon research. Since the LDS Church course of study for 1996 will be the Book of Mormon, you can make the year a Book of Mormon year for your friends and family by giving them an *Insights* gift subscription to enrich their study.

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