



# Insights

A WINDOW ON THE ANCIENT WORLD JANUARY 2001

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## AAR/SBL Annual Conference Includes Topics Relevant to Mormon Studies

The annual meetings of the American Academy of Religion (AAR) and the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) held in Nashville, Tennessee, this past November included presentations on topics of interest to scholars and students of ancient scripture.

In one of the AAR sessions, Brian M. Hauglid, assistant professor of ancient scripture at BYU, read his paper on “The Abraham Narrative of al-Thaëlabī: The Making of an Islamic Mythology.” The writings of Muslim writer al-Thaëlabī (d. 1036) preserve many interesting traditions regarding the Old Testament prophets. Focusing on the use of the Abraham figure in later Muslim traditions, Hauglid demonstrated the similarities of the Muslim traditions regarding Abraham to those of the Jews and Christians.

The Muslim traditions are unique, however, because they have been reworked so that Abraham serves as a type of Muhammad and thus prefigures him. In this view similarities between the two figures include the signs and prophecies connected with their birth, the miraculous feeding of both babies, a

revelation concerning the one God, and disdain for idolatry. Of related interest to Latter-day Saints will be the forthcoming FARMS publication *Abrahamic Lore in Support of the Book of Abraham*, edited by Brian Hauglid, FARMS associate director of research John Tvedtnes, and FARMS assistant research professor of Egyptology John Gee. The book will contain a great deal of information derived from Hauglid’s extensive study of Abraham in Islamic tradition.

In an SBL session Jared Ludlow, assistant professor of history at BYU—Hawaii, read a paper titled “Humor and Paradox in the Characterization of Abraham in ‘The Testament of Abraham.’” Discussing two versions of the ancient Greek text *The Testament of Abraham*, Ludlow proposed a means of reconciling the different ways Abraham is portrayed therein. First, he considered how humor and paradoxical characterization were used in Recension A. In this version all of the positive descriptions about Abraham by other characters and the narrator are challenged by Abraham’s actions and speech, which represent him as stubborn, secretive, and unwilling to follow God’s messengers.

All such negative characteristics were removed in a second version of the Abraham story, Recension B, to present a more righteous, obedient Abraham. Yet Recension B maintained many of the humorous

[continued on page 5](#)

## New FARMS Board Member

BYU president Merrill J. Bateman has appointed Gary R. Hooper, currently associate academic vice president at BYU, as a member of the FARMS Board of Trustees.

Hooper is a plant scientist and received his Ph.D. in plant pathology at the University of California—Riverside in 1968. He has been a pro-

fessor of botany and plant pathology at Michigan State University (1968–1980) and at Virginia Tech (1980–1992).

While at Virginia Tech he served as department head and as vice provost of research and dean of the graduate school. He was a charter trustee of the Virginia Museum of Natural History until his move to Utah in 1992. At BYU he has served as executive director of the Office of Research and Creative

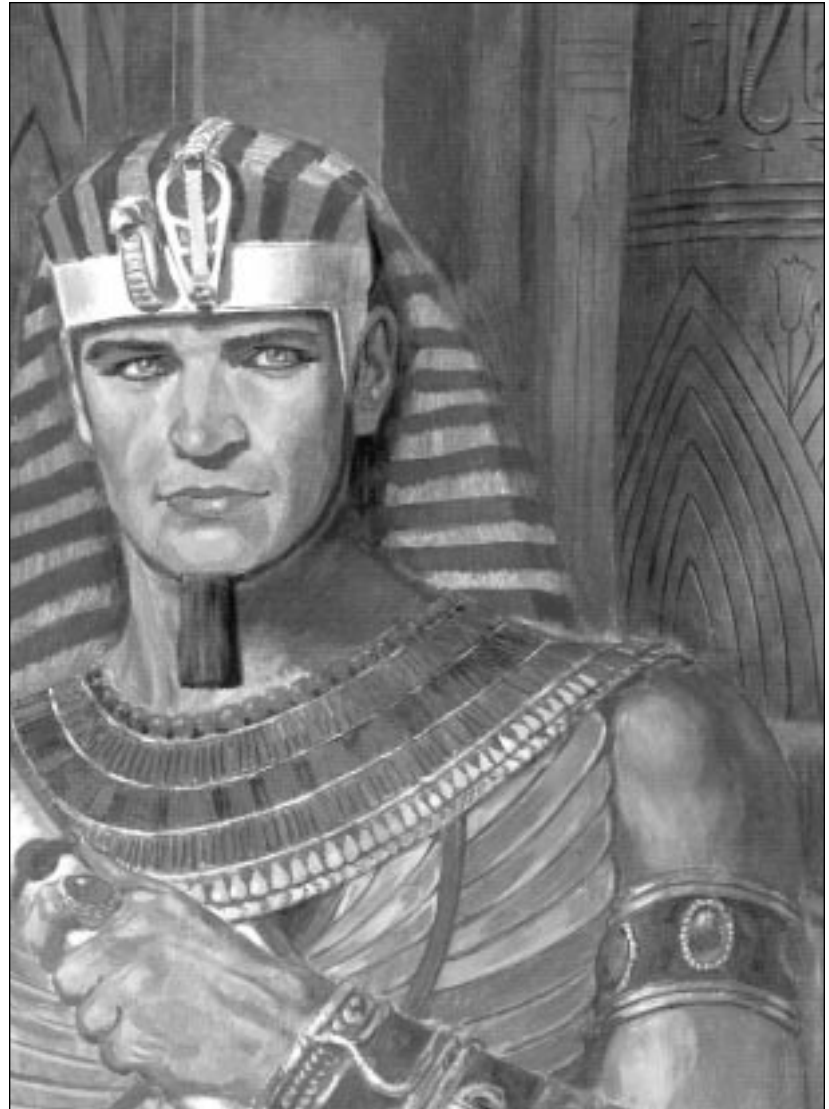
[continued on page 4](#)

## Joseph's Prophecy of Moses and Aaron

While admonishing his son Joseph, Lehi told him of a prophecy uttered by their ancestor Joseph of Egypt, who had foreseen that the Egyptians would bring the Israelites into bondage. Part of that prophecy spoke of “Moses, whom I [the Lord] have said I would raise up unto you, to deliver my people, O house of Israel. And Moses will I raise up, to deliver thy people out of the land of Egypt” (2 Nephi 3:9–10).

Joseph further declared: “And the Lord hath said: I will raise up a Moses; and I will give power unto him in a rod; and I will give judgment unto him in writing. Yet I will not loose his tongue, that he shall speak much, for I will not make him mighty in speaking. But I will write unto him my law, by the finger of mine own hand; and I will make a spokesman for him” (2 Nephi 3:17). This prophecy is also found in Genesis 50:29, 34–35 of the Joseph Smith Translation, which adds that the name of the spokesman would be Aaron.

Joseph's prophecy of Moses is confirmed in Jewish tradition, notably in two of the second-century-A.D. *targumim*, or translations of the Bible into Aramaic.<sup>1</sup> In a lengthy addition



Joseph of Egypt, by Robert T. Barrett

Joseph of Egypt prophesied that Moses and Aaron would come to deliver Israel from Egypt.

to Genesis 40:12 in *Targum Neofiti*, Joseph interprets the three branches of the butler's dream as representing “Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the sons of whose sons are to be enslaved in the slavery of the land of

Egypt and are to be delivered by the hands of three faithful leaders: Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, who are to be likened to the clusters of grapes.”<sup>2</sup> Similarly, in the Talmud, Rabbi Joshua interpreted the three branches as repre-

senting Moses, Aaron, and Miriam (Babylonian Talmud, *Hullin* 92a).

From the standard account in Genesis 50:24–25, it is clear that Joseph was aware that the Israelites would someday leave Egypt, though he says nothing about the bondage they would endure in the meanwhile. But *Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer* 48<sup>3</sup> cites the passage from Genesis and includes Joseph’s prophecy of the bondage and deliverance of the Israelites. In *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* of Genesis 50:24, Joseph tells his family, “Behold you will be enslaved in Egypt, but do not make plans to go up out of Egypt until the time that

two deliverers come and say to you, ‘The Lord surely remembers you.’”<sup>4</sup> This suggests that Joseph knew about the coming of Moses and Aaron to liberate Israel and confirms Joseph Smith’s addition to that very place in the Genesis account.

Though the Jewish tradition regarding Joseph of Egypt’s prophecy about Moses and Aaron can be traced to the second century A.D., the relevant texts were not available to Joseph Smith. The existence of that prophecy in both the Book of Mormon and the Joseph Smith Translation of Genesis provides evidence for the historicity of the account.

#### Notes

1. The Hebrew word *targum* (plural *targumim*) means “translation” and refers to the Aramaic translations of the Bible made after the Jews adopted Aramaic instead of Hebrew as their native tongue during the Babylonian captivity.
2. Martin McNamara, *Targum Neofiti 1: Genesis*, The Aramaic Bible, vol. 1A (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 182.
3. Rabbi Eliezer lived during the latter part of the first century A.D., but most scholars believe that the text was actually written in the eighth century A.D. It nevertheless reflects an ancient tradition.
4. Michael Maher, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Genesis*, The Aramaic Bible, vol. 1B, 166.

**By John Tvedtnes**

## Membership Options (Effective 1 January 2001)

Option	Annual Rates	Membership Benefits
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## John the Baptist and the Key of Baptism

The Latter-day Saint concept of priesthood keys is not well documented in the Bible. A single passage has Jesus Christ promising to give Peter “the keys of the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 16:19), while the book of Revelation indicates that Christ held “the keys of hell and of death” and “the key of David” (Revelation 1:18; 3:7; see Isaiah 22:22). There is no mention of keys in connection with John the Baptist.

Nevertheless, when John came to ordain Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery to the Aaronic Priesthood on 15 May 1829, he indicated that this priesthood “holds the keys of the ministering of angels, and of the gospel of repentance, and of baptism by immersion for the remission of sins” (D&C 13:1). A Christian document from Ethiopia, thought to date to the 15th century but containing older concepts, speaks of “John the Baptist unto whom was given the key of baptism.”<sup>1</sup>

We regret the loss of Elder Hugh W. Pinnock, a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy of the LDS Church, who died from pulmonary fibrosis on 15 December 2000 at the age of 66. In 1999 FARMS published Elder Pinnock’s book *Finding Biblical Hebrew and Other Ancient Literary Forms in the Book of Mormon*, which furthered the literary study of the Book of Mormon. We appreciate the many contributions Elder Pinnock made to the church, the community, and to the work of FARMS.

Another document of similar interest comes from the Mandaeans, who claim to be descendants of the disciples of John the Baptist, whom they call by his Arabic name Yahya. Called *Haran Gawaitha*, the text says of John that “when he was seven years old, [the angel] Anush ‘Uthra came and wrote the ABC (*a ba ga*) for him, until when he was twenty-two years old, he had learnt all the priestly-craft (*nas.irutha*).”<sup>2</sup> The tradition that at a young age John the Baptist was visited by an angel is in general agreement with D&C 84:28, which states that John “was baptized while he was yet in his childhood, and was ordained by the angel of God at the time he was eight days old.”

### Notes

1. Ernest A. Wallis Budge, *The Book of the Mysteries of the Heavens and the Earth and Other Works of Bakhayla Mika’el (Zosimas)* (Oxford, 1935), 105.
2. Elisabeth S. Drower, *The Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran* (Leiden: Brill, 1962), 4.

—Contributed by John A. Tvedtnes

## New Board Member

[continued from page 1](#)

Works (1992–1996). He was appointed associate academic vice president for research and graduate studies in 1996.

Hooper continues to be active in botanical work and has a personal interest in the origins of agriculture in Mesoamerica. As a board member he will bring experience in seeking external funding support for FARMS projects. He will also continue in his role as FARMS administrative liaison to the academic vice president’s office.

Commenting on his new appointment, Hooper said, “I have enjoyed my association with FARMS and its board this past year and have become even more appreciative of all the good work and publications being produced. I look forward to continuing this association and contributing to the progress of FARMS.”



## AAR/SBL continued from page 1

plot elements of Recension A that seem out place in B. Ludlow argued that the use of humorous elements is the key to unlocking the relationship between the two versions and demonstrates their dependency on each other and not on a “Ur-source” that we no longer have.

Professor Donald Redford of the University of Pennsylvania dealt with aspects of Egyptian law in the sixth century B.C., a rarely discussed topic. Jack Welch, Robert K. Thomas Professor of Law at BYU and a FARMS board member, attended this lecture and noted a number of points might prove relevant to Book of Mormon studies. For instance, Redford pointed out that Egyptian law was often promulgated by public readings to popular convocations (one thinks of King Benjamin’s address in Mosiah 2–6). The Egyptians were meticulous in keeping journals, or day books, to record legal activities, depositions, indictments, and decisions (one recalls the official records kept by the Nephites year after year in which numerous legal concerns were recorded). Redford said that during this time the Egyptians increasingly turned to divine manifestations for decisions in legal proceedings (consider the prominence of divine signs given in the cases of Sherem and Korihor as possible similarities).

Welch points out that although biblical scholars usually turn to the Babylonian legal experience for parallels in studying biblical law, the fact that Lehi knew Egyptian (and that Uriah and Jeremiah fled to Egypt) may point us more in the direction of the land of the Pharaohs in search for a clearer understanding of the nature and practice of law during the era in which Lehi and Nephi lived.

Kristian Heal, CPART research associate and associate editor of METI’s Eastern Christian Texts

Series, attended a lecture that related to his work on ancient Syriac scriptures and related texts. The lecture was given by Dr. Baster Haar Romeny of the Peshitta Institute (at the University of Leiden), the coordinating institution for a number of sig-



Eileen Wilson and Irena Abramian help show FARMS products at the BYU booth during the AAR/SBL Conference in Nashville, Tennessee.

nificant projects relating to the Syriac version of the Old Testament. Over the last four decades, the Peshitta Institute has produced a critical edition of the Old Testament in Syriac. This is of great significance for a number of reasons, including the importance of the Peshitta as an early versional witness to the original Hebrew Bible (the oldest complete Syriac translation predates the oldest complete Hebrew Bible manuscript by several centuries).

Romeny explored the *Wirkungsgeschichte*, or effective history, of the Peshitta version among the Syriac-speaking Christian communities, which have used this version of the Hebrew Bible since its translation in the second century A.D. During the course of its use by the church, a number of scholars felt that revisions were in order to improve

the text, particularly in light of the Greek Septuagint version of the Hebrew Bible.

One of the most important of this group of biblical revisers was Jacob of Edessa (640–708), a polymath of considerable genius who undertook a revision of the text of Genesis as well as a commentary and book of *scholia* (selected comments) on the same. Romeny explored the relationship between the biblical text quoted in the different works on Genesis and the development of Jacob's ideas with respect to his revision of the text. He identified how the text was revised to reflect changes in the meaning of words over time and developments in the understanding of the original text of the Bible. According to Heal, Jacob's work reflects the concerns of all those who use a translation of the scriptures, namely, that the translation be as faithful to the original as possible so that none of a text's power, force, or meaning is lost.

In addition to attending the AAR/SBL meetings, BYU professor Daniel C. Peterson, chair of the FARMS Board of Trustees and director of CPART, spoke at a cottage meeting in Chattanooga and at a stake fireside in Knoxville on the topic "Other Voices from the Dust: BYU and Ancient Manuscripts."

A major feature of the AAR/SBL joint meetings is the combined effort of more than 200 publishers—major university presses, large and small commercial firms, and numerous specialized publishing organizations from all over the world—to exhibit their recent titles. As they have done previously, BYU's FARMS and CPART, along with the Religious Studies Center, the Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History, and BYU Studies, joined in displaying nearly 100 recent BYU publications.

The combined BYU display was organized by Brent Hall, assistant executive director at FARMS, and James Hughes, FARMS's distribution manager. Several scholars associated with the various BYU units involved worked at the exhibit, helping to answer questions and deal with several hundred people who inquired about scholarly work at BYU. Recent publications on LDS scriptures and church history were prominently featured at the display, and several copies of the Book of Mormon were given away. Titles of particular interest to non-LDS scholars were also featured and in some cases demonstrated. These included CPART's *Dead Sea Scrolls Electronic Reference Library*, now marketed by E. J. Brill, as well as recent titles from the three series within CPART's Middle Eastern Texts Initiative (METI): the Islamic Translation Series, the Eastern Christian Texts Series, and the Graeco-Arabic Sciences and Philosophy Series.



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## The Purpose of FARMS

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. It also works to preserve ancient religious documents.

FARMS is a nonprofit educational foundation at Brigham Young University. 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. These publications are peer reviewed to ensure scholarly standards are met. The proceeds from the sale of these publications, including most royalties, are used to support further research and publications on the scriptures. 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 take more seriously these ancient witnesses of the atonement of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

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