New Book: LDS Scholars Explore the Nature and Significance of Temples in Ancient and Modern Times

Three essays by Hugh Nibley, all the papers presented at the 1993 F.A.R.M.S. annual symposium, other important temple papers, a keynote address by Elder Marion D. Hanks (former president of the Salt Lake Temple), striking illustrations by Michael Lyon (who illustrated Nibley’s Temple and Cosmos)—these features and more make Temples of the Ancient World: Ritual and Symbolism one of the most significant volumes ever published on the temple. Never has one book contained so many original contributions by LDS scholars to our understanding of ancient temples and their modern counterparts.

Temples of the Ancient World focuses on the temple in the Hebrew Bible and the ancient Near East, in the New Testament, in Jewish writings, and in the Book of Mormon and ancient America. Its twenty-four essays examine the meaning of sacred vestments and sacred time, the rich symbolism of the temple ceremonies, the distinction between sacred versus profane space, temple architecture, and the relationship of the temple to kingship, law, and covenants (see the order form for a complete table of contents). The insights gained from these studies also generate reflections on the modern temple.

The Saints have always been a temple-building people. From the Kirtland temple to the sacred structures of today, the Latter-day Saints have built temples wherever they have been. This great concern for sacred houses of the Lord has been shared by the people of God in past dispensations as well. “What was the object of gathering the Jews, or the people of God in any age of the world?” Joseph Smith asked. “The main

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

Spring 1994 Issue of the Journal of Book of Mormon Studies Released

The latest issue of the Journal of Book of Mormon Studies features studies of the language, literary style, theology, and history of the Book of Mormon. The following essays are included:

- “What’s in a Name? Book of Mormon Language, Names, and [Metonymic] Naming,” Gordon C. Thomasson
- “The Original Language of the Book of Mormon: Upstate New York Dialect, King James English, or Hebrew?” Royal Skousen
- “Recurrence in Book of Mormon Narratives,” Richard Dilworth Rust
- “Dissent: Perspectives from the Book of Mormon,” Lynn D. Wardle
- “A Response to David Wright on Historical Criticism,” Kevin Christensen
- “The Secular as Sacred: The Historiography of the Title Page,” David B. Honey
- “The Jaredite Exodus: A Literary Perspective of a Historical Narrative,” John S. Thompson
- “Enallage in the Book of Mormon,” Kevin L. Barney
- “Cry Redemption: The Plan of Redemption as Taught in the Book of Mormon,” Corbin T. Volluz
- “Historical Parallels to the Destruction at the Time of the Crucifixion,” John A. Tvedtnes
- Notes and Communications
  * “Lehi’s Jerusalem and Writing on Metal Plates,” William J. Adams, Jr.
  * “My First-Born in the Wilderness,” John A. Tvedtnes

This issue of the Journal of Book of Mormon Studies may be ordered using the enclosed order form.
Metal Plates and the Book of Mormon

I

In the past critics of the Book of Mormon have attacked the alleged absurdity of the Book of Mormon having been written on golden plates and its claim of the existence of an early sixth century B.C. version of the Hebrew Bible written on brass plates.1 Today, however, critics almost universally admit that there are numerous examples of ancient writing on metal plates. Ironically, some critics now claim that knowledge of such plates was readily available in Joseph Smith’s day. Hugh Nibley’s 1952 observation seems quite prescient: “it will not be long before men forget that in Joseph Smith’s day the prophet was mocked and derided for his description of the plates more than anything else.”

Recent reevaluation of the evidence now points to the fact that the Book of Mormon’s description of sacred records written on bronze plates fits quite nicely in the cultural milieu of the ancient eastern Mediterranean.

One of the earliest known surviving examples of writing on “copper plates” are the Byblos Syllabic inscriptions (eighteenth century B.C.), from the city of Byblos on the Phoenician coast. The script is described as a “syllabary [which] is clearly inspired by the Egyptian hieroglyphic system, and in fact is the most important link known between the hieroglyphs and the Canaanite alphabet.”2 It would not be unreasonable to describe the Byblos Syllabic texts as eighteenth century B.C. Semitic “bronze plates” written in “reformed Egyptian characters.”

Walter Burkert, in his recent study of the cultural dependence of Greek civilization on the ancient Near East, refers to the transmission of the practice of writing on bronze plates (Semitic root dlt) from the Phoenicians to the Greeks. “The reference to ‘bronze deltoi [plates, from dlt]’ as a term [among the Greeks] for ancient sacrals laws would point back to the seventh or sixth century [B.C.]” as the period in which the terminology and the practice of writing on bronze plates was transmitted from the Phoenicians to the Greeks.5 Students of the Book of Mormon will note that this is precisely the time and place in which the Book of Mormon claims that there existed similar bronze plates which contained the “ancient sacred laws” of the Hebrews, the close cultural cousins of the Phoenicians.

Burkert also maintains that “the practice of the subscriptio in particular . . . connects the layout of later Greek books with cuneiform practice, the indication of the name of the writer/author and the title of the book right at the end, after the last line of the text; this is a detailed and exclusive correspondence which proves that Greek literary practice is ultimately dependent upon Mesopotamia. It is necessary to postulate that Aramaic leather scrolls formed the connecting link.”6 Joseph Smith wrote that “the title-page of the Book of Mormon is a literal translation, taken from the very last leaf, on the left hand side of the collection or book of plates, which contained the record which has been translated.”7 This idea would have been counterintuitive in the early nineteenth century when “Title Pages” appeared at the beginning, not the end, of books.

Why, then, did Joseph claim the Book of Mormon practiced subscriptio—writing the name of the author and title at the end of the book? If the existence of the practice of subscriptio among the Greeks represents “a detailed and exclusive correspondence which proves that Greek literary practice is ultimately dependent upon Mesopotamia [via Syria],” as Burkert claims, cannot the same thing be said of the Book of Mormon—that the practice of subscriptio represents “a detailed and exclusive correspondence” which offers proof that the Book of Mormon is “ultimately dependent” on the ancient Near East?

Notes
4. Nibley, Lehi in the Desert, 105-6, mentions these plates, which were not deciphered until 1985.
6. Ibid., 32.
7. HC 1:71, emphasis added.

Based on research by William J. Hamblin
New Temple Book

object was to build unto the Lord a house whereby he could reveal unto his people the ordinances of his house and the glories of his kingdom” (HC 5:423-24).

The temple was so important to the ancient Israelites and the other people of the ancient Near East that it played a prominent role not only in their religion but also in their government, economy, art, and social structure. The tabernacle of Moses was so important to the Israelites that they carried it with about them in their wanderings to serve as a mobile sanctuary. The temple of Solomon in Jerusalem became the political and religious focal point for the kingdom of Israel under the reigns of the early Israelite kings. During his mortal ministry, Jesus placed great emphasis on the temple of Herod—it was a place where he both learned and taught. Soon after their arrival in the New World, the Nephites built a temple patterned after the temple of Solomon, and it was at the temple in Bountiful that the resurrected Lord visited and taught the Nephite faithful.

The recent popularity of Hugh Nibley’s Temple and Cosmos indicates that Latter-day Saints are vitally interested in temples and information related to sacred structures and rituals. The information in the new volume builds on and goes beyond the discussions in Temple and Cosmos. New and significant material is presented especially about the temple in the Book of Mormon and about temple imagery in the Revelation of John, the book of Hebrews, and the epistles of Peter.

Readers of the 805-page Temples of the Ancient World will gain a greater appreciation for the temples of old and, at the same time, come to more fully understand the temples of the present era.

See the order form for details on ordering this significant volume at a special introductory price of $22.50.

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BOOK OF MORMON BRAIN TEASER

On Your Honor

What is an oath worth? It depends on who makes it. Each person (or group of people) from the Book of Mormon listed below on the left is associated in some way with oaths or promises. Match the person or group with the correct situation on the right. [This quiz was submitted by Jeanine Tew. We welcome similar educational contributions from other readers.]

1. ____ Akish
   A. Gadianton robber leader. Swore an oath to destroy all the Nephites unless they surrendered to him. Laid siege but failed to defeat them.

2. ____ Amalickiah
   B. Made an oath never to take up arms again after being converted to Christ—and didn’t.

3. ____ Giddianhi
   C. Arch enemy of Captain Moroni. Swore to drink Moroni’s blood but died without getting a sip.

4. ____ Jesus Christ
   D. Nephi’s oath convinced this man that he would be safe if he left Jerusalem with Lehi’s family.

5. ____ Lamanites
   E. Put the idea of using secret oaths and combinations to gain power into Gadianton’s heart.

6. ____ People of Ammon
   F. A Lamanite warrior who refused to take an oath of peace because he was sure he would break it.

7. ____ Mormon
   G. Wanted to be king of the Jaredites. Set up a conspiracy using secret oaths.

8. ____ Satan
   H. Promised the people of Alma their liberty if they would reveal the way to the land of Nephi—but didn’t keep the promise.

9. ____ Zerahemnah
   I. Took an oath not to lead the Nephites in a battle again, but after seeing their heavy losses, he relented and assumed command.

10. ____ Zoram
    J. Taught people not to swear oaths except with simple “yeas” and “nays.”

answer key on page 4

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Participants at BYU Summer Programs Are Invited to Visit F.A.R.M.S.

INSIGHTS subscribers who attend programs at BYU this summer, such as Education Week or the CES Symposium, as well as any other friends of F.A.R.M.S. who find themselves in Provo, are invited to stop by the F.A.R.M.S. office. You’ll find us on the third floor of Amanda Knight Hall, which is on the southwest edge of the BYU campus, on the corner of University Avenue and 800 North. There will also be displays of F.A.R.M.S. materials in the BYU bookstore and at the CES Symposium teaching fair.

Board Notes

Donald W. Parry has returned from six months in Jerusalem. In addition to teaching an intensive Hebrew class at the BYU Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies, he provided volunteer help at the Dead Sea Scrolls Foundation, resulting in his being invited to assist Frank M. Cross in the preparation of one of the scroll volumes in the official publication series, Discoveries in the Judean Deseret.

Stephen D. Ricks has left BYU for a year overseas—six months in Vienna with BYU Study Abroad and six months at the BYU Jerusalem Center. He will continue to serve as chairman of the F.A.R.M.S. board of directors and edit the Journal of Book of Mormon Studies during that time.

Another member of the board, Daniel C. Peterson, has left Provo for most of the summer to participate in an NEH Summer Seminar at Princeton University on magic and religion in antiquity.

Upcoming Events

- July 17: KBYU will begin broadcasting the F.A.R.M.S. Book of Mormon Lecture Series each Sunday at 4:30 P.M.
- September 17: Truman G. Madsen will speak at a F.A.R.M.S.-sponsored fireside in San Jose, California.
- October 13: Elder Henry B. Eyring will be the featured speaker at the annual F.A.R.M.S. banquet. 7:00 P.M., Garden Court of the BYU Wilkinson Center.
- November 27: A F.A.R.M.S.-sponsored ten-day tour will leave for Jerusalem, led by John W. Welch.

Brain Teaser Key

2. C  7. I
3. A  8. E
5. H 10. D

The Purpose of F.A.R.M.S.

The Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (F.A.R.M.S.) encourages and supports research about the Book of Mormon, Another Testament of Jesus Christ, and other ancient scriptures. F.A.R.M.S. 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.
FEATURED IN THIS ISSUE

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Ritual and Symbolism

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