



Insights

A WINDOW ON THE ANCIENT WORLD VOLUME 22 | 2002

Number 3

<http://farms.byu.edu>

New Resource on Ancient Maya Writing Released

A new volume published under the Institute's Research Press imprint is *A Thematic Bibliography of Ancient Maya Writing*, by Stephen D. Houston and Zachary Nelson. "Many people don't know about the quantity of research on ancient Maya writing," says Houston, a BYU professor of anthropology who is an authority on Maya writing. "In fact, the literature is overwhelmingly large. This bibliography provides a roadmap through that literature."

The bibliography arranges hundreds of publications into nine sections. The section titled "Discovery" lists publications that report on the first eyewitnesses who saw Maya writing in use and discussed the script with native scribes. Because of pressure from Spanish authorities, these scribes soon went out of business, in some cases possibly transferring their literacy to roman script. "Nature of Maya Writing" lists works dealing with the pivotal question of how

scholars have understood the writing system and what its components or spelling rules might have been. "History" relates to the first glimmerings and eventual triumphant discovery that Maya inscriptions contained historical records structured according to Maya needs and dynastic glorification.

Publications grouped under "Time" discuss the Maya practice of placing events in a temporal and astronomical context. For a long period the only understood portion of the Maya texts was time, and the associated numbers proved more amenable to analysis than the other portions of the glyphic texts (whose content has been revealed only in the last two decades). The section on "Supernaturals" relates to the presence of god names in the Maya "screenfold" books. Works in the "Objects" section treat a principal preoccupation of Maya texts: the dedication and possession of sacred objects and valuables, which the Maya "name-tagged" (denoted ownership) by means of hieroglyphic texts. These objects include chocolate vessels with text reporting ownership and even the

[continued on page 4](#)

Latest Occasional Papers Highlights Biblical Scholar

A new publication from the Institute highlights the biblical research of a prominent British scholar. Kevin Christensen's "Paradigms Regained: A Survey of Margaret Barker's Scholarship and Its Significance for Mormon Studies," the second issue of the *FARMS Occasional Papers*, compares the works of Margaret Barker with the writings of many Latter-day Saint researchers, including Hugh W. Nibley, Daniel C. Peterson, and John W. Welch.

Christensen begins with a short biography of Barker, a Cambridge-educated math and religion teacher, Methodist preacher, and member (and

recent past president) of the Society for Old Testament Study. Barker has published seven books and several journal articles, all of which are gaining increasing attention among LDS scholars because of the author's prodigious scholarship, profound insight, and, to use Christensen's words, "overall paradigm [that] burst[s] with information and insight of peculiar interest to Mormons."

Christensen goes on to examine the main themes of Barker's works. One theme that resonates with LDS readers is her idea of an "older testament"—a theory that before about 600 B.C. the Israelite religion had elements that were later lost or removed from the Old Testament. Many of those early elements align with ideas and theologies in the Book of Mormon

[continued on page 4](#)

Editor's Note: Updates report and encourage ongoing research. The recent Update "Scouring with Faggots" (vol. 21, no. 7, 2001) called attention to an Aztec method of punishment that may help explain the curious wording in Mosiah 17:3 regarding Abinadi's execution. The following report takes an alternative approach to this text, from the perspective of textual studies.

'Scourged' vs. 'Scorched' in Mosiah 17:13

Very often in my work on the critical text of the Book of Mormon, I have discovered cases where the text reads inappropriately. Book of Mormon researchers have typically attempted to find some circumstance or interpretation to explain a difficult reading, but in many cases I have found that difficult readings are actually the result of simple scribal errors.

One example of this is in Mosiah 17:13–14:

and it came to pass that they took him and bound him and **scourged** his skin with faggots yea even unto death and now when the flames began to scorch him he cried unto them saying . . .

The word *scourged* is found in the printer's manuscript (in Oliver Cowdery's hand). This reading is followed by the 1830 and all subsequent editions. Unfortunately, the original manuscript is not extant for this passage.

There are considerable problems with the use of the word *scourged* in Mosiah 17:13. First of all, the verb *scourge* means 'to whip,' which does not make sense here, especially since faggots

(bundles of sticks for burning) are seemingly being used to whip (or perhaps beat) Abinadi to death. One can, I suppose, construct various scenarios in which one can be beaten to death with faggots.

More serious, however, is the fact that elsewhere the Book of Mormon text always refers to Abinadi as having been burned to death, not beaten or whipped:

Mosiah 17:18

and in that day ye shall be hunted and ye shall be taken by the hand of your enemies and then ye shall suffer as **I suffer the pains of death by fire**

Mosiah 17:20

and now when Abinadi had said these words he fell having **suffered death by fire**

Alma 25:9

thus the words of Abinadi were brought to pass which he said concerning the seed of the priests who caused that he should **suffer death by fire**

Alma 25:11

and now Abinadi was the first that **suffered death by fire** because of his belief in God now this is what he meant that **many should suffer death by fire** according as he had suffered

Thus the current reading in Mosiah 17:13 ("scourged his skin with faggots") contradicts all other places in the text which refer to Abinadi's death by fire.

The solution to these problems is to emend the word *scourged* in Mosiah 17:13 to *scorched*. In the very next verse (Mosiah 17:14), the text specifically refers to the flames scorching Abinadi ("the flames began to scorch him"). In fact, the word *scorch* is precisely in accord with Book of Mormon usage. This verb is always used to refer to burning the surface of something. Consider, for instance, the two other uses of *scorch* in the Book of Mormon text:

Alma 15:3

and this great sin and his many other sins did harrow up his mind until it did become exceedingly sore having no deliverance therefore he began to be **scorched** with a burning heat

Alma 32:38

and when the heat of the sun cometh and **scorcheth** it because it hath no root it withers away and ye pluck it up and cast it out

Interestingly, the same use of *scorch* for burning people is found in a comment by the Elizabethan John Hooker about the Spanish in the Americas:

they subdued a naked and yielding people . . . and against the course of all human nature did **scorch** and roast them to death (cited in Paul Johnson,

Maya Writing continued from page 1

recipes of particular decoctions. Other sections in the bibliography are “Principles of Decipherment,” “Mayan Languages and People,” and “Sites.”

According to Houston, the bibliography is a companion piece to *The Decipherment of Ancient Maya Writing*, which he recently published with Oswaldo Chinchilla and David Stuart. “Together,” says Houston, “these works should provide scholars with a key resource for understanding the great intellectual adventure of glyphic decoding.”

To obtain a copy of *A Thematic Bibliography of Ancient Maya Writing*, see the enclosed order form or visit the catalog section of the FARMS Web site. 

Occasional Papers continued from page 1

concerning divine visions, the prominent role of temples, and characteristics of the Messiah.

Throughout the paper, Christensen compares Barker’s works with the writings of LDS scholars. He devotes an entire chapter to showing how the Savior’s visit to the Nephites in 3 Nephi 8–28 fits perfectly with the ancient Israelite beliefs about the roles of the high priest, as well as with the Israelites’ Messianic expectations.

Christensen ends his paper with a challenge to researchers to examine Barker’s works. He suggests topics that could be rich sources of insight into the Old Testament and the Book of Mormon. To fully appreciate the scriptures, Christensen argues, a reader must challenge his or her own assumptions and be willing to accept new ideas, such as those found in the works of Margaret Barker.

To obtain a copy of *FARMS Occasional Papers 2*, see the enclosed order form or visit the catalog section of the FARMS Web site. 

UPCOMING EVENT

Saturday, 23 March 2002 “The World of Abraham,” a FARMS conference on the Book of Abraham, BYU Tanner Building, room 151, 9:00 A.M.–1:00 P.M. Admission is free.

FORTHCOMING PUBLICATION

Susanna: Texts, Translations, and Technical Notes, edited by Mark A. Sedgwick, includes the Greek, Latin, and English texts of the apocryphal book of Susanna. This third monograph in the Ancient Texts and Mormon Studies series is available in April 2002.

Insights

A Window on the Ancient World
Volume 22 | Number 3 | 2002

A Publication of the
**Foundation for Ancient Research
and Mormon Studies (FARMS)**

**Institute for the Study and
Preservation of Ancient Religious Texts**
Brigham Young University

Institute Board

Douglas M. Chabries <i>Chair</i>	John E. Clark Gary R. Hooper Donald W. Parry Daniel C. Peterson Noel B. Reynolds
David R. Seely <i>Vice-Chair</i>	Michael D. Rhodes Stephen D. Ricks
John F. Hall <i>Acting Vice-Chair</i>	Andrew C. Skinner John W. Welch
Daniel Oswald <i>Executive Director</i>	

Insights Staff

Don L. Brugger, Managing Editor
Jacob D. Rawlins, Assistant Editor
Jeanna Mason, Editorial Intern

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.

For more information or to order publications, contact us at
P.O. Box 7113, University Station, Provo, UT 84602
1-800-327-6715 (or 801-373-5111)
Web site: farms.byu.edu