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The Newsletter of
the Foundation for
Ancient Research
& Mormon Studies

INSIGHTS

AN ANCIENT WINDOW

December 1996

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

FARMS Grant Will Support Excavation in Guatemala

FARMS has joined three other foundations in making a grant to support the excavation of an ancient Maya city, Piedras Negras, located on the banks of the Usumacinta River in Guatemala. The FARMS grant will allow the excavation team, led by Stephen Houston (Brigham Young University) and Hector Escobedo (San Carlos University), to extend their work into the southern sector of the site, where they hope to unearth portions of an early temple summit, a palace, and a ritual purification building to learn more about urban life in an early Mesoamerican city.

Piedras Negras dates to the Classic Maya period (A.D. 250 to 900). FARMS hopes that archaeological excavation and anthropological study at Piedras Negras can increase our understanding of the Maya civilization and possibly reveal information about its decline.

Previous excavations at the site have focused mainly on finding pieces for display purposes, not for scientific study. Data from the few scientific studies are outdated, unpublished, incomplete, or narrow in their focus (e.g., only examining ceramics), and old or unapproved study techniques have damaged parts of the site.

The window of opportunity for learning from the Piedras Negras site is closing. Changing local political conditions have created the potential for increased looting to occur in the area and, even more serious, the Mexican government is planning to begin damming operations on

the nearby river that will surely damage or destroy the site. Fortunately, because of an unusually favorable political climate in Guatemala, more permits to excavate monumental architecture in Latin America are being granted and the excavation team has received a permit.

New Center Created to Preserve Ancient Religious Texts

The well-publicized Dead Sea Scrolls project that FARMS is jointly pursuing with BYU (to produce a CD-ROM containing translations, transcriptions, and digital images of the scrolls) continues to progress well. In addition to the contribution to scroll scholarship that this project has allowed FARMS to make, it has taught the Foundation some important things about the creation of such databases that will benefit the eventual creation of a FARMS Book of Mormon database. And it has attracted the attention of people and organizations that want to preserve other ancient writings. FARMS is now assisting in the digital storing of images of ancient Maya murals at Bonampak (see previous issues of *Insights* for information on the

Bonampak project) and has been given custodianship of photographs of ancient Syriac documents.

Success can bring problems, and problems sometimes can be turned into opportunities. The Foundation's Board of Trustees has become concerned that the proliferation of such electronic projects might detract from the central mission of FARMS, which is to promote scholarly study of the Book of Mormon and other ancient scripture. Yet the manuscripts and writings involved have such historical value that it would be a shame to miss the opportunity to preserve them in some form accessible to future scholars.

In light of these concerns, the FARMS Board of Trustees

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The Foundation for
Ancient Research
& Mormon Studies

FARMS UPDATE

A Report on Research in Progress

Number 109

New Technology and Ancient Questions

The potential of advanced scientific techniques for giving us new information about ancient history has sometimes been overhyped, yet real advantages are becoming apparent. Interestingly, however, the findings are more likely to produce fascinating and useful new questions than to settle old ones neatly.

A recent example comes from study of the genetic (DNA) make-up of cotton. Half a century ago botanical studies revealed that the common New World cotton species that yielded the cotton fibers used in the civilizations of Peru and Mesoamerica had resulted from a combination of an Old World species with some American wild plant. Those who believed that voyagers crossed the ocean from Asia to America, including prominent botanists, argued that the most likely way this genetic joining of cottons took place was that humans in boats brought cotton seeds with them.

Subsequently, radiocarbon dating of archaeological specimens showed that cotton was in use in Mesoamerica at a such an early date (7000 years ago) that introduction of the Old World cotton by any voyage seemed out of the question. Today, DNA analysis has shown that indeed cotton has been growing in this hemisphere for so long that the only logical means for it to have arrived in the New World so early was by natural accident—prob-

ably by floating on the ocean.

But a new study comes up with a new question. Botanist J. F. Wendel and colleagues at Iowa State University have shown from an investigation of the DNA composition of cotton species worldwide (in Africa, Australia, and America) that indeed interhemispheric sharing had to have taken place long ago, before human hands could have been involved. But they also found one species that grows in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec area in southern Mexico that shows an unexplained hybridization with or descent from an African cotton. The botanists cannot establish a mechanism for this connection, although it may have happened "during the last several thousand years."¹

Note that recent evidence from linguistics² and art³ may indicate some kind of voyaging connection between Egypt and southern Mexico, perhaps less than 3000 years ago. Such a voyage or voyages might have introduced the African cotton characteristics. One possibility for such a voyage that occurs to Latter-day Saints in terms of the Book of Mormon is the ship that brought Mulek to the promised land, although other possibilities exist.

Incidentally the Iowa State study of cotton also demonstrated that a native species found in Hawaii was directly linked genetically with the commonest domesticated cotton of Mexico. A

voyage by humans from Mesoamerica into Polynesia may be the explanation. Even more mysterious is the fact that Wendel's data show that a unique cotton on the Galapagos Islands west of South America is directly tied to a species in Baja California, thousands of miles to the north! David H. Kelley of the University of Calgary has demonstrated from language, myth, and calendar data that a voyaging party from western Mexico must have reached Polynesia, possibly by way of South America, a couple of thousand years ago.⁴

Other recent applications of new technologies to old questions appear to produce both answers and questions about voyaging from southeast Asia to the Americas and about the use of drugs native to the Americas among ancient Egyptians (see the next issue of *Insights* for a FARMS Update on these topics).

NOTES

1. See J. F. Wendel, A. Schnabel, and T. Seelanan, "An Unusual Ribosomal DNA Sequence from *Gossypium gossypioides* Reveals Ancient, Cryptic, Intergenomic Introgression," *Molecular Phylogenetics and Evolution* 4/3 (1995): 298-313.
2. See *Insights* (June 1995): 2.
3. See R. A. Jairazbhoy, *Ancient Egyptian Survivals in the Pacific* (1990) and *Ramses III: Father of Ancient America* (1992).
4. See "Tane and Sina: A Uto-Aztecan Astronomical Cult in Polynesia," in *Circumpacifica, Band II: Ozeanien, Miscellen*, ed. B. Illius and M. Laubscher (1990), 137-56.

Based on research by John L. Sorenson

Scholar watch

Nibley Fellowships Awarded

The Nibley Fellowship awards support graduate students working in accredited programs throughout the world who are studying in areas of particular interest to FARMS. In addition to support for three of last year's recipients, this year's awards will help six new fellows.

Allen J. Christenson is pursuing a Ph.D. in Pre-Columbian Art History at the University of Texas at Austin.

Allison D. Clark is pursuing a master's degree in Religious History at Boston University School of Theology with an emphasis on Christian Studies.

Carl Griffin is completing his master's program in the Department of Early Christian Studies and beginning doctoral studies, focusing on Early Syrian Chris-

tianity, at the Catholic University of America.

Brian H. Hauglid is finishing his master's degree in Middle Eastern Studies, with an emphasis on Arabic and Islamic Studies, at the Middle Eastern Center at the University of Utah.

Kristian S. Heal is finishing his master's degree in Syriac Studies at Wolfson College, Oxford University, and will enter the Ph.D. program at the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London.

Frank F. Judd Jr. is continuing his Ph.D. work in Ancient Mediterranean Religions with focus on Early Christianity, especially the New Testament, in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Jennifer C. Lane is in the second year of her Ph.D. work on the History of Christianity, focusing on Early and Medieval Christian Thought, at Claremont Graduate School.

Jared A. Ludlow is in his third year of doctoral work in a joint Ph.D. program with the Near Eastern Studies Department of the University of California at Berkeley and the Graduate Theological Union. Jared's emphasis is on New Testament History, particularly the Origins of Christianity in the Inter-Testamental Period.

Eric E. Vernon is in the second year of the master's program in Biblical Studies at the Yale University School of Divinity. He plans to remain at the school to pursue his Ph.D. in Biblical Law.

The Nibley Fellowship program is made possible by generous donations, for which the recipients, the Nibley family, and the Foundation are grateful. For more information, contact FARMS.

FARMS research notes

Terms for Ancient Places

The terminology that we use to refer to long lost lands and cultures can be confusing. For example, the October FARMS Update (number 108) referred to Mesopotamia in the cultural sense rather than in a geographic sense—ancient Ebla was at various times within the cultural sphere of Mesopotamia but is not part of the geographic area usually referred to as Mesopotamia. Even the geographic sense is ambiguous; some reputable reference works (perhaps the majority) use *Mesopotamia* to refer to the fertile land between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, while others extend the area considered to be part of Meso-

potamia to the northwest to include all of the plains drained by the two rivers.

John Gee, who alerted FARMS to the potential connections between the archaeological evidence at Ebla and the book of Abraham, did not use the word *Mesopotamia* in his communication with FARMS; he believes that the evidence points to Syria as the homeland of Abraham. FARMS regrets any inadvertent misrepresentation of Gee's views. This example reminds us of the need for care in establishing the meaning and context of the terms we use to refer to ancient places and cultures.

Call for Papers

Proposals for papers are being sought for the 1997 Sidney B. Sperry Symposium (Fall Semester), sponsored by BYU Religious Education. This year's theme will be "Voices of the Prophets: The Old Testament."

Inquiries and proposals may be directed to Dennis Wright, 275E JSB, BYU, Provo, UT 84602; phone 378-8931; E-mail dawright@reled.byu.edu. The deadline for submissions is 6 January 1997.

Publicly speaking

Brown Bags Shine Light on Nephite Culture and History

On 27 September, Professor Ninian Smart, an internationally recognized scholar of comparative religion and philosophy of religion from the University of California, Santa Barbara, visited Utah Valley to give a keynote address at a conference held at a nearby college. During his visit, Professor Smart met with FARMS Brown Bag attendees to discuss his experiences in the field of religious studies. He pointed out that it is increasingly a multidisciplinary field that makes greater demands on those who study it. In particular he discussed the need for scholars in religious studies to gain an empathetic perspective on the subject they are studying—that scholars studying Mormonism, for example, could hardly hope to understand it without some empathy for its beliefs and practitioners.

John L. Sorenson, professor emeritus of Anthropology at BYU, gave an update and outline on October 16 of one of his current projects, a book tentatively titled *An Illustrated Companion to the Book of Mormon*. Sorenson showed and discussed slides of some of the remarkable photos and illustrations he plans to include in the high-quality, large-format book. This project grew out of Professor Sorenson's desire to convey visually to nonscholars, including non-LDS readers, a sense of the reality of Nephite culture by providing a concrete reconstruction of the original settings for scenes and circumstances described in the Book of Mormon.

On 25 October, Marlon A.

Nance presented research on volcanic activity that may have relevance to the account of destruction in 3 Nephi. Nance is a pursuing a Ph.D. in geology at the University of California, Davis, and is a lecturer in geology and oceanography at California State University, Sacramento. He discussed research that has established that the thickness of the layer of tephra (ash and other particles) that is deposited by an explosive eruption is proportional to both the distance from the eruption and the number of hours of darkness produced by the cloud of tephra.

Furthermore, the tephra from one eruption is chemically distinct from the tephra from any other eruption.

Theoretically, therefore, it should be possible to examine the thickness and chemical composition of tephra deposits in Mesoamerica and compare them to known eruptions that occurred within the right time frame to be candidates for a volcanic event that would match the description of three days of darkness. This is a project that Nance hopes to begin after the completion of his graduate studies.

New FARMS reprint

Language Shifts Provide Evidence

In a recently published article, "Dating the Book of Mormon to Pre-exilic Language Structure," Angela M. Crowell reports her findings from a study of language patterns. Crowell bases her findings on recent research about Classical Biblical Hebrew and Late Biblical Hebrew, the languages of Judah before and after the Babylonian exile in 586 B.C. Scholars have identified the books of Samuel and Kings as classic examples of preexilic writing. Because much of the same historical account is given in postexilic Chronicles, they can observe the change in language patterns and terminology that took place during the exile.

Since the Book of Mormon attests that Lehi's family left Jerusalem before the Babylonian

exile, one would expect the Book of Mormon language to resemble the preexilic language structure. Crowell explores evidence to support this claim. The phrase *and it came to pass*, the interjection *behold*, and the compound expressions *house of Israel* and *children of Israel* are used much more frequently in preexilic biblical writings than in postexilic books. Crowell shows how the Book of Mormon writings fit the pattern of preexilic Classical Biblical Hebrew.

This finding lends yet another support for the authenticity of the Book of Mormon, particularly for the truthfulness of Lehi's and Nephi's account. Copies of this reprint can be obtained using the enclosed order form.

*Publicly speaking***Denver Stakes Host Symposium on Book of Mormon**

In an effort to spark interest in the Book of Mormon and to increase missionary endeavors, the Denver Stake sponsored a three-day Book of Mormon Symposium in September, ending on September 22 to commemorate the anniversary of the date Joseph Smith received the gold plates from the angel Moroni to begin the translation of the Book of Mormon.

Although all members from five stakes in the Denver area were invited to attend, the symposium was directed specifically to less-active members and to those not of the LDS faith. One session was held specifically for local clergy and others whose professions involve religion.

The Denver Stake asked FARMS to help in organizing the symposium. Faculty members from Brigham Young University Truman G. Madsen, Daniel C. Peterson, and John W. Welch were invited to join other speakers, including Elder Marion D. Hanks, in making presentations at this unique event. Each gave multiple presentations, including question-and-answer sessions, to enthusiastic audiences in two crowded stake centers.

Each speaker bore testimony of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon and of the Savior. Topics included "Testimonies of Christ in the Book of Mormon" (John W. Welch), "The Atonement of Christ as Taught in the Book of Mormon" (Truman G. Madsen), "Internal and External Evidences of the Truthfulness of

the Book of Mormon" (Daniel C. Peterson), and "Why I Believe the Book of Mormon" (Elder Marion D. Hanks). Other presentations discussed what the Book of Mormon teaches about the Godhead, the purpose of the Book of Mormon, and the existence of modern revelation.

The Denver Stake attributes the symposium's success both to the professionally qualified and personally committed speakers and to the enthusiasm of local

members and full-time missionaries. The symposium helped LDS attendees refresh their testimonies and their commitment to the Book of Mormon, and it gave nonmember attendees an friendly, inspiring introduction to the messages of the Book of Mormon. It appeared to the organizers that all in attendance were powerfully impressed with the messages and touched by the Spirit.

Continued from page 1

New FARMS Center Established

has created a subsidiary of FARMS, tentatively being called the FARMS Center for the Electronic Preservation of Ancient Religious Texts. The Center will be dedicated to collecting and digitizing images, transcriptions, and translations of ancient religious documents, both Christian and non-Christian, and making these collections available for scholarly study. Interpretation of these texts will be left to other scholars—the focus of the FARMS Center will be on preservation and improving access.

FARMS has sought and received sufficient new funding to operate the Center for three years at the current level of activity. Additional funding will be sought from both LDS and non-LDS parties interested in the preservation of ancient texts.

The Center will have its own staff and funding separate from the rest of FARMS, with some organizational support from the parent Foundation. Other details about the Center, such as location and administration, are still being discussed.

The Center's first mission will be to complete the Dead Sea Scrolls project and begin a new project recently approved by the FARMS Board of Trustees—cataloguing the digital images of Syriac documents that are already in FARMS's possession. Funding already received should be sufficient to ensure the completion of those projects. Copies of other collections of ancient documents may be preserved by the Center as additional funding becomes available.

New FARMS publication

Reprint Clarifies Issues on Geographies Focused on New York

A new FARMS Reprint makes available portions of three publications from the 1980s that retain their value for providing insights into Book of Mormon geography. In "A Key for Evaluating Nephite Geographies," reprinted from the first issue (1989) of the *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon*, John Clark elucidates what the Book of Mormon itself says that can be used to construct a basic framework for a Book of Mormon geography. He focuses especially on those references that give relative distances or directions between various locations. The resulting framework provides an excellent test for proposed geographies.

In 1981, David A. Palmer's *In Search of Cumorah* was published. Chapter 1 of that book, entitled "Why Search for Cumorah?" which is included in this reprint, summarizes some of the evidence for and against the idea that the hill in New York called Cumorah is the same hill called Cumorah in the Book of Mormon. He concludes that there are two hills and that the area in which the events described in the Book of Mormon took place is not upstate New York.

In 1985, John L. Sorenson's many years of study of the setting for the Book of Mormon resulted in the publication of *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*. Included in this FARMS reprint is chapter 1, "The Book of Mormon Mapped," which lays out the requirements for a Book of Mormon geography and shows that a limited portion of Mesoamerica fits those requirements best.

These three essays should prove useful to anyone who wants an introduction to the best thinking on Book of Mormon geography and especially to individuals who are trying to make sense of the recent spate of geographic speculation that tries to fit the events and places described in the Book of Mormon into an area focused on upstate New York. Applying Clark's framework to both the New York theories and the model Sorenson and Palmer describe shows how well the limited Mesoamerican model has aged over the last decade. To obtain your copy of this FARMS Reprint, see the order form.

Housekeeping

New Law Governs Stock Donations

The new "Business Act" has created a new opportunity for persons looking for tax deduction opportunities. Donors have until 31 May 1997 to take advantage of an expanded tax deduction (based on market value rather than cost) for contributions of publicly held stock to private foundations like FARMS. There are limits, of course. Consult a competent professional for more information and for answers to specific questions.

INSIGHTS AN ANCIENT WINDOW

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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.

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 research on such subjects is 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 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.

Friend-raiser

People you know might like to receive this Newsletter. You are our best means of letting others know about the services that the Foundation can provide. It is a big help to all if you can send us the names of your friends who you think might be interested in the work of the Foundation. We will send them an introductory packet describing FARMS and extending an invitation to subscribe.

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FARMS Welcomes a New Editor

Donald L. Brugger joined the FARMS editorial team in November as Editor. A native of southern California, Don received a bachelor's degree in English with a minor in Journalism from Utah State University in 1984. He joined the Church while at USU, then served a mission in Argentina after graduating. He later taught high school English before receiving a master's degree in American Literature from BYU. After working for two years at Deseret Book, Don spent the past



five years editing for the *Ensign* magazine.

About his new position at FARMS, Don says, "I am eager to ply my trade in an academic arena and to deepen my understanding of a vast array of topics related to the Book of Mormon and other ancient scripture." He looks forward to delving into new projects and becoming better acquainted with the FARMS staff, researchers, and volunteers. Don and his wife, Tonya, have three daughters.

Benefits of Subscription

Regular Subscription—still only \$12 per year (\$30 for 3 years).

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Catalog Number	Items featured in this issue	Qty.	Unit Price	Total Price
CRO-96	Angela Crowell, "Dating the Book of Mormon to Pre-exilic Language Structure," FARMS Reprint from <i>Qumran Quest Bulletin</i> , 2 pp.		\$.50	
CPS-96	"Introduction to Book of Mormon Geography," FARMS Reprint of John Clark, "A Key for Evaluating Nephite Geographies," David A. Palmer, "Why Search for Cumorah?" and John L. Sorenson, "The Book of Mormon Mapped." 63 pp.		\$3.00?	
Selected items featured in previous issues of Insights				
REV-96b	Daniel C. Peterson, ed., <i>FARMS Review of Books</i> , 8/2, 450 pp.		\$7.95	
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J-96a	Stephen D. Ricks, ed., <i>Journal of Book of Mormon Studies</i> 5/1 (Spring 1996), 185 pp.		\$7.95	
PMT-96	Donald W. Parry, Jeanette W. Miller, and Sandra A. Thorne, eds., <i>A Comprehensive Annotated Book of Mormon Bibliography</i> , hardbound, 650 pp., Research Press		\$99.95	
PMT-96s	Donald W. Parry, Jeanette W. Miller, and Sandra A. Thorne, eds., <i>A Guide to Publications on the Book of Mormon</i> , paperbound, FARMS, 410 pp.		\$19.95	
SOR-85p	John L. Sorenson, <i>An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon</i> , paperback 415 pp., FARMS and Deseret Book, retail \$17.95		\$14.35	

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