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INSIGHTS

A WINDOW ON THE ANCIENT WORLD

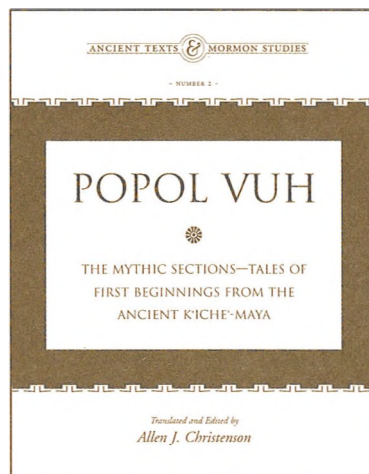
June 2000

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

New Translation of Popol Vuh Available

Popol Vuh: The Mythic Sections—Tales of First Beginnings from the Ancient K'iche'-Maya, translated and edited by Allen J. Christenson, is the second book in FARMS's Ancient Texts and Mormon Studies series. Inaugurating the series was James E. Faulconer's *Romans 1: Notes and Reflections*. Works in this series include the text in its original language, a readable English translation, and commentary on the text especially by LDS scholars.

Christenson follows suit with a literal translation of the Popol Vuh as well as a free, or nonliteral, translation of the text that he hopes will better communicate the flow of the narrative to the modern reader. Additionally, Christenson provides 343 notes explaining important details of the text, an appendix of the Guatemalan government's official decree of the "Program of Bilingual Education" in Maya communities, and a helpful bibliography of works related to the Popol Vuh. This book was prepared for publication by the editors and staff of BYU Studies.



The Popol Vuh was compiled in the mid-16th century. According to Christenson, the Popol Vuh "is the most important highland Maya text in terms of its historical and mythological content, as well as a sublime work of literature, composed in rich and elegant poetry." Because of its exquisite poetic form, Christenson says, the Popol Vuh is similar to the epic Greek poems *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. In his introduction, Christenson identifies multiple forms of parallelism in the Popol Vuh, including the form known as chiasmus.

The K'iche' were a branch of the Maya people that inhabited the highlands of western Guatemala before Columbus landed in the New World, and it was anonymous members of the K'iche'-Maya nobility who wrote the Popol Vuh. Christenson's translation concentrates on the first sections of the Popol Vuh, which describe the creation of the world and its people in a time that the book's authors call "prior to the first dawning of the sun" (see the accompanying article on page 3).

continued on page 3

The Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls

In the June 1999 issue of *Bible Review*, Sidnie White Crawford, associate professor and chair of the Department of Classics at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, considers what the Dead Sea Scrolls reveal about the position of early Jews on the emendation, authority, and canonicity of bibli-

cal texts.¹ Crawford begins by noting that neither a canonical Bible nor even a fixed text of the Torah (Genesis–Deuteronomy) existed when the Dead Sea Scrolls were written (250 B.C.–A.D. 70).

Because some of the Dead Sea Scrolls biblical texts differ significantly from the three major textual traditions of the Hebrew Old Testament (the Masoretic text, Septuagint, and Samaritan

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The Foundation for
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FARMS UPDATE

A Report on Research in Progress

Number 135

“Slippery Treasures” in the Book of Mormon: A Concept from the Ancient World

In calling the Nephites to repentance, Samuel the Lamanite warned that “the time cometh that [the Lord] curseth your riches, that they become slippery, that ye cannot hold them; and in the days of your poverty ye cannot retain them” (Helaman 13:31). In that day the Nephites would lament, “We have hid up our treasures and they have slipped away from us, because of the curse of the land. O that we had repented in the day that the word of the Lord came unto us; for behold the land is cursed, and all things are become slippery, and we cannot hold them” (vv. 35–36).

More than three centuries later, Mormon recorded that, in fulfillment of Samuel’s prophecy, the Gadianton robbers “did infest the land, insomuch that the inhabitants thereof began to hide up their treasures in the earth; and they became slippery, because the Lord had cursed the land, that they could not hold them, nor retain them again” (Mormon 1:18).

Some critics have suggested that these passages reflect beliefs prevalent in Joseph Smith’s day. One such belief was that guardian demons moved buried treasures to different locations when people dug for them. Because the

general idea of slippery treasures appears in the Book of Mormon, critics see it as evidence of the book’s supposed 19th-century origin. However, the concept of slippery treasures is found to have existed in the ancient Near East of Lehi’s time.

One example comes from the *Instructions of Amenemope*, an Egyptian text dating to between the 11th and 13th centuries B.C. and believed by many to have been the source for a portion of the biblical book of Proverbs. Proverbs 23:4–5 closely parallels chapter 7 of *Amenemope*. Compare the first lines of each passage:¹

Do not wear yourself out to get rich; be wise enough to desist. (Proverbs)

Do not strain to seek an excess, when thy needs are safe for thee. (*Amenemope*)

Compare also the end of each passage:

When your eyes light upon it, it is gone; for suddenly it takes wings to itself, flying like an eagle toward heaven. (Proverbs)

(Or) they [riches] have made themselves wings like geese

and are flown away to the heavens. (*Amenemope*)

Even more significantly, the middle section of the *Amenemope* passage is *not* paralleled in Proverbs, but it *is* similar in theme to the “slippery treasures” passages in the Book of Mormon: “If riches are brought to thee by robbery, they will not spend the night with thee; at daybreak they are not in thy house: their places may be seen, but they are not. The ground has opened its mouth . . . that it might swallow them up, and might sink them into the underworld. (Or) they have made themselves a great breach of their (own) size and are sunken down into the underworld.”

It seems more than coincidental—yet not surprising—that the concept of slippery, disappearing treasures is found both in an Egyptian text known to the ancient Israelites and in the Book of Mormon, a record with cultural, linguistic, and literary roots in the ancient Near East.

NOTE

1. The translations of Proverbs and the *Instructions of Amenemope* are from Karel van der Toorn, “Did Ecclesiastes Copy Gilgamesh?” *Bible Review*, February 2000, 28.

Based on research by Kevin L. Barney

Creation Stories from Popol Vuh

The following extracts are from Allen J. Christenson's free translation of the creation accounts found in the Popol Vuh. According to Christenson, this religious book of the K'iche'-Maya was completed in the mid-16th century, yet it contains "ancient theological concepts current among the people of Mesoamerica at a time contemporaneous with Book of Mormon history." Readers interested in the following accounts may wish to consult Christenson's complete translation of the Popol Vuh (see article on page 1) because of the helpful glosses that are not reproduced here.

PREAMBLE

THIS IS THE BEGINNING OF THE ANCIENT TRADITIONS of this place called K'iche'.

HERE we shall write. We shall commence to tell the ancient stories of the beginning, the origin of all that was done in the citadel of K'iche', among the people of the K'iche' nation.

Here we shall take up the manifestation, the declaration, the account of that which is hidden in darkness and that which is brought to light by the Framer and the Shaper, She Who Has Borne Children and He Who Has Begotten Sons, as they are called. . . .

This account we shall now write under the law of God and Christianity. We shall bring it forth because there is no longer the means whereby the Popol Vuh may be seen, the light that had come from across the sea,

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FARMS WEB PAGE UPDATE

<http://farms.byu.edu>

Each month both the Member Services and Free Services sections of the FARMS Web site feature a paper. This month's featured paper is "Zion and the Spirit of At-one-ment," by M. Catherine Thomas. Thomas emphasizes that a condition of peace



M. Catherine Thomas

is necessary in order for us to experience the companionship of the Spirit. We sometimes experience troubled relationships, but we can elect to develop a satisfying sense of "at-one-ment" with our associates. Thomas cites the example of Nephi, who experienced dysfunctional family relationships but understood, as he explains in his psalm (2 Nephi 4), that how we are judged will be based not on what others do to us, but on how we react to them. This understanding of our freedom to choose not to harbor ill will toward those who offend us but, rather, to let go and turn to the Lord can set us free from old contentious patterns.

Also visit the Events Calendar in the Free Services section of the Web site. Regular visits to this area will keep you updated on times and locations of FARMS lectures and events, including the schedule for the Dead Sea Scrolls traveling exhibit.

New Translation (continued from page 1)

Christenson explains that "both Genesis and the Popol Vuh describe an age in which people forgot their creators and were destroyed by a great flood. In the Popol Vuh, this period involved a people made of wood that walked according to their own desires, having neglected to worship the gods."

This 298-page work is augmented with 20 eye-catching photographs and drawings pertinent to the Popol Vuh's ancient origins. Christenson writes: "The Popol Vuh is the most important example of pre-Columbian Maya literature to have survived the Spanish Conquest. . . . The first line of the Popol Vuh declares the book to be *u xe' ojër tzij*, which

may be translated literally as 'its root ancient word.' The phrase indicates that the authors will attempt to give an account of the ancient history of the K'iche' people from their first origin. The remainder of the book is thus seen as growing like a plant from this 'root.' The imagery is a beautiful expression of the K'iche's world-view as an agricultural society."

Christenson completed this entirely new translation of the Popol Vuh by collaborating with K'iche' speakers native to the highland Guatemalan towns of Momostenango, Totonicapan, and Cunén and by drawing on his own knowledge of the language. As he explains, "In translating the text, I have tried

Creation Stories from Popol Vuh (continued from page 3)

the account of our obscurity, the vision of the light of life, as it is said. The original book exists that was written anciently, but its witnesses and those who ponder it hide their faces.

Great are its descriptions and its account of the final germination of all the sky and earth, of the establishment of their four sides, their four corners. All then was measured and staked out into four divisions, doubling over and stretching the measuring cords of the womb of heaven and the womb of earth. Thus were completed the four sides, the four corners, as it is said, by the Framer and the Shaper, the Mother and the Father of life and all creation, the giver of breath and the giver of heart, she who bears and heartens the true nation, those born of the Mother of Light and those begotten of the Father of Light, they who are compassionate and wise in all things—all that exists in the sky and on the earth, in the lakes and in the sea.

THE PRIMORDIAL WORLD

THIS IS THE ACCOUNT of when all is yet silent and placid. All is silent and calm. Hushed and empty is the womb of the sky.

THESE then are the first words, the first speech. There is not yet one person, one animal, bird, fish, crab, tree, rock, hollow, canyon, meadow, or forest. All alone the sky exists. The face of the earth has not yet appeared. Alone lies the expanse of the sea, along with the womb of all the sky. There is not yet anything gathered together. All is at rest. Nothing stirs. All is scattered, at rest in the sky. There is not then anything that exists raised up. Only the expanse of the water, only the tranquil sea lies alone. There is not then anything that might exist, for all lies placid and silent in the darkness, in the night. . . .

THE CREATION OF THE EARTH

THEN came his word. Heart of Sky arrived here with Sovereign and Quetzal Serpent in the darkness, in the night. He spoke with Sovereign and Quetzal Serpent. They talked together then. They thought and they pondered. They reached an accord, bringing together their words and their thoughts. Then they gave birth, heartening one another. The light went forth. They gave birth to humanity. Thus they arranged for the germination of the trees and bushes, the sprouting of all life and humanity, in the darkness and in the night. . . .

Then they called forth the mountains from the water. Straightaway the great mountains came to be. It was merely their spirit essence, their miraculous power, that brought about the creation of the mountains and the valleys. Straightaway were created cypress groves and pine forests to cover the face of the earth.

Thus Quetzal Serpent rejoiced:

"It is good that you have come, Heart of Sky—you, Huracan, and you as well, Small Thunderbolt and Sudden Thunderbolt. That which we have framed and shaped shall turn out well," they said.

First the earth was created, the mountains and the valleys. The waterways were divided, their branches coursing among the mountains. Thus the waters were divided, revealing the great mountains. For thus was the creation of the earth, created then by Heart of Sky and Heart of Earth, as they are called. They were the first to conceive it. The sky was set in place. The earth also was firmly set in place in the midst of the waters. Thus was conceived the successful completion of the work as they thought and as they pondered.

New Translation (continued from page 3)

to bear in mind that the results must accurately echo the voice of [the Popol Vuh's] ancient authors so that their words may be heard again with the meaning they intended. It is my hope that I have been faithful to their message."

Many Latter-day Saint scholars consider the Popol Vuh to be the most authentic source of ancient pre-Columbian history and religion from the

New World outside canonized scripture. Although the Popol Vuh was compiled centuries after the Book of Mormon record was completed, Christenson's translation of that work will interest enthusiasts of pre-Columbian texts and those intrigued by ancient literature of the Americas. For ordering information, see the enclosed order form or visit the FARMS Web site.



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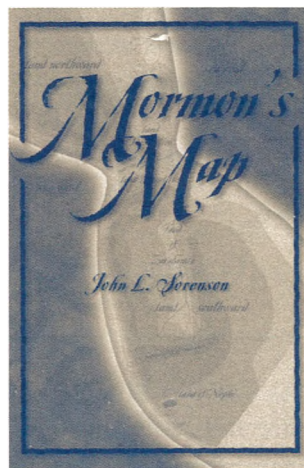
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This new selection of materials from the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* includes 151 articles on the Book of Mormon by 115 scholars and articulate authors. *To All the World* is intended for all kinds of readers—young and old, novices and experts, Latter-day Saints and those of other faiths.

This book offers concise treatments of the contents, peoples, teachings, and coming forth of the Book of Mormon, as well as photographs, maps, charts, and a helpful scriptural index. *To All the World* serves as a valuable introduction to many topics of interest related to the Book of Mormon.



As Mormon edited the Book of Mormon, he must have had a map in his mind of the places and physical features that were the setting for the events described in that book. *Mormon's Map* attempts to reconstruct that mental map by using information carefully gleaned from the text. The resulting theoretical model can be applied to the Book of Mormon to

shed new light on the influence of geography on Nephite history, increase our understanding of the book and its characters, and make events and places more concrete in our minds.

The Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls (continued from page 1)

Pentateuch), Crawford asks, "In ancient times, how far could these texts deviate and still be considered biblical? Or authoritative?" She approaches this complex issue by looking at two kinds of scribal alterations evident in the scrolls—"harmonizations," which she suspects did not detract from the authority of the texts, and new additions, which she believes probably did. Her first example concerns three variations of the commandment to keep the Sabbath day holy, found in Exodus 20:8–11, Deuteronomy 5:12–15, and the Dead Sea Scroll text 4QDeuteronomyⁿ.

Crawford explains that the difference between the Exodus and Deuteronomy texts ("remember the Sabbath day" and "observe the Sabbath day," respectively) is one of context. The rationale for the Exodus version is that "the Israelites must remember the Sabbath because the Lord rested on the seventh day after creating the universe in six days," while the Deuteronomy version emphasizes Sabbath observance because of the Israelites' former slavery in Egypt. Crawford observes that 4QDeuteronomyⁿ harmonizes these two versions simply by combining both justifications: "Observe the Sabbath day," it charges, because Israel was "a servant in the land of Egypt. . . . For [in] six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, . . . and he rested on the seventh day."

According to Crawford, first-century readers would probably have recognized the 4QDeuteronomyⁿ version of the fourth commandment "as a harmonization of the other two existing versions. . . . Would that have made any difference to the authority of the text? Probably not. For Second Temple period Jews [those living before A.D. 70], the authority of these books lay in each book's general message rather than in its precise words or their order. The words of the biblical text could be manipulated—moved around, updated, added to—without detracting from the authoritative status of the book. This . . . certainly seems to have been true for the Jews of Palestine."

But what about the addition of new material to biblical texts? Did that kind of alteration undermine their authority? In search of an answer, Crawford turns to the "parabiblical" Dead Sea Scrolls text called 4QReworked Pentateuch, one manuscript of which (4Q365) adds seven lines to

Miriam's song in Exodus 15:21. Although Crawford acknowledges that we simply do not know if that addition of new text affected the authority of the Exodus text, she surmises that it probably did, since circumstantial evidence suggests that the altered passage was no longer circulated, copied, or quoted elsewhere in literature of the period, nor in later rabbinic literature. So although "4Q365 may have had authority for a limited audience around the time of its production, it was never generally accepted as authoritative."

Crawford believes that a "canon, or list of sacred books, and an authoritative, unchangeable text" were beginning to take place by the end of the first century A.D. The Dead Sea Scrolls throw light on this transition: "A number of fragmentary biblical scrolls dating to the second century A.D., discovered in caves south of Wadi Qumran, suggest that at about the time a canon was developing, so too was the notion of a fixed authoritative text." Crawford concludes that "after the fall of the Temple in A.D. 70, the canonical list becomes fixed in Palestinian Judaism, as does the text of those canonical books. No deliberate changes would henceforth be made. A great tradition of innerbiblical exegesis—so clearly reflected in the Dead Sea Scrolls—had come to an end."

While Crawford cites instances in which scribal emendations of the Dead Sea Scrolls appear to have produced or preserved better readings of biblical texts,² she also acknowledges that the centuries-long process of hand copying those texts sometimes resulted in errors. For many people of faith, the idea that uninspired scribes tampered with biblical texts originally penned by prophets is disturbing, particularly if that tampering led to errors in modern versions of the Bible. Donald W. Parry, a Latter-day Saint member of the international team of scholars working on the Dead Sea Scrolls, has observed that although "variant readings are frequent in the ancient versions and textual witnesses of the Old Testament," the Bible remains a remarkable treasury of prophetic material.³ LDS Church leaders have continually affirmed the value of the King James Version of the Bible and the Prophet Joseph Smith's inspired revision of it. Latter-day Saints are also fortunate to have the Book of Mormon and modern revelation to guide them as they search

revealed scripture and look forward to additional records that have been prophesied to come forth.

What of the Dead Sea Scrolls? Parry advises Latter-day Saints who are interested in the scrolls to approach them as they would the Apocrypha, concerning which the Lord said: "There are many things contained therein that are true . . . ; there are many things contained therein that are not true, which are interpolations by the hands of men. . . . Therefore, whoso readeth it, let him understand, for the Spirit manifesteth truth; and whoso is enlightened by the Spirit shall obtain benefit therefrom; and whoso receiveth not by the Spirit, cannot be benefited" (D&C 91:1-2, 4-6).⁴

NOTES

1. Sidnie White Crawford, "The Fluid Bible: The Blurry Line between Biblical and Nonbiblical Texts," *Bible Review*, June 1999, 34-39, 50-51.

2. Other scholars have made similar observations. See, for example, Eugene Ulrich, "The Bible in the Making," in *The Community of the Renewed Covenant: The Notre Dame Symposium on the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. Eugene Ulrich and James VanderKam (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 84, where Ulrich argues that scribal efforts to enrich and adapt the biblical texts among the Dead Sea Scrolls was part of a "traditioning" process that made the texts more relevant and authoritative; John Tvedtnes, "The Isaiah Variants in the Book of Mormon" (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1981), in which Tvedtnes shows that the Isaiah scroll (1QIsa^a) from Qumran supports many readings of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon that differ from those in the Bible; and Donald W. Parry, "The Contribution of the Dead Sea Scrolls," in *LDS Perspectives on the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. Donald W. Parry and Dana M. Pike (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1997), 59-60, where Parry gives examples of scriptural passages missing from the Bible that were discovered in the Dead Sea Scrolls texts, "many of which may be inspired writings of God." He also discusses the extent to which modern English editions of the Bible favor variant readings from the Dead Sea Scrolls (64-65).

3. Parry, "Contribution of the Dead Sea Scrolls," 55, 65-66.

4. Donald W. Parry and Stephen D. Ricks, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Questions and Responses for Latter-day Saints* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2000), xi.

Upcoming events

The free exhibit featuring Dead Sea Scroll replicas and artifacts continues to tour the Midwest until 30 August 2000. For the latest information about specific times and locations regarding the following schedule, contact an area stake center or visit the FARMS Web site (from the Free Services or the Member Services page, go to "Dead Sea Scrolls," found under "Links of Interest," and then to "Dead Sea Scrolls Traveling Exhibit").

- 13-14 June St. Louis, Missouri
- 16-17 June St. Louis, Missouri
- 22 June-30 Aug. Nauvoo, Illinois

INSIGHTS

A WINDOW ON THE ANCIENT WORLD

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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. 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.

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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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