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The Editor's Notebook

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Title The Editor's Notebook

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Abstract Introduction to the current issue.

THE EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK

The chambers of the Book of Mormon hold spiritual prizes for those who are willing to seek them. In this issue, four distinguished authors explore some of the literary treasures that lie within the pages of this unique collection of scriptural books, two others uncover how the 19th-century public received and perceived the Book of Mormon, and one author illumines a possible connection between Mulek, son of King Zedekiah, and an ancient artifact found near Jerusalem.

The four literary studies in this issue celebrate the literary riches of the Book of Mormon. These articles follow a long and growing list of skilled efforts to plumb the literary depths of the book, starting with early attempts to deal with recognizable literary units such as Nephi's psalm (see 2 Nephi 4:16–35) and continuing with more recent book-length works that explore subtle dimensions of the literary feast awaiting the careful reader. Robert A. Rees skillfully turns our gaze to twists of irony woven into the fabric of both sermons and narratives, prophecy and poetry. Perhaps Rees's most tantalizing insight features Nephi's use of the term *know* in his hard-hitting sermon to his brothers as he is about to build his ship (see 1 Nephi 17). Significantly, no irony appears in the writings of Joseph Smith, indicating a distance between his literary gifts and those of the authors of the Book of Mormon, whose words he translated.

John W. Welch, paying attention as he does to scriptural nuances, noticed a recurring pattern of 10 words or concepts in an unexpected number of key passages in the Book of Mormon. His further exploration led to the discovery therein not of numerology but of the ancient, sacred character of the number ten and its intimate tie to the work of God, whether in its manifestation in the Ten Commandments or in the concept of tithing, whether in the names and titles for God or in the concept of completion or perfection.

In a very different vein, Paul Y. Hoskisson has undertaken a reexamination of the words *straight* and *strait*, responding to an earlier study published in the *Journal* by Noel B. Reynolds and Royal Skousen (2001). While the two words sound the same in English and therefore invite confusion, their dissimilar meanings were readily apparent in ancient Hebrew. On the basis of ancient literary contexts for these words, Hoskisson reaches conclusions different from those of the earlier study, suggesting that the readings of *straight/strait* in the current edition of the Book of Mormon in English are faithful to the world out of which the Book of Mormon grew.

Word pairs form the chief focus of James T. Duke's study on a range of suggestive word combinations that grace the pages of the Book of Mormon. Duke's work il-

lustrates that the underlying spoken language of Book of Mormon peoples drew on ancient patterns of speech and was vibrantly alive. It is striking that many word combinations common in Joseph Smith's literary and verbal worlds, such as *far/wide* and *words/deeds*, do not appear in the Book of Mormon, pointing to the observation that the Prophet did not author the Book of Mormon, whose lines often exhibit surprising word combinations, but was rather its translator.

The longest and the shortest studies in this issue of the *Journal*, by Richard H. Cracroft and Clark V. Johnson, respectively, examine the reception of the Book of Mormon in the wider American public, but from very different angles. Cracroft has assembled noted 19th-century American authors' responses to the publication of the Book of Mormon. Most authors, as expected, turned a hostile eye toward the book that others had come to revere as scripture. Cracroft's penetrating review, written in his vivid style, is the most comprehensive ever published on this subject.

Johnson has drawn upon his massive compilation of the Missouri redress petitions, published by the BYU Religious Studies Center in 1992, to set before readers the highly charged atmosphere in Missouri during the 1830s into which the Book of Mormon was carried. Almost overnight the book became a test of a person's loyalty to the restored Church of Jesus Christ, for it was seen by adherents and detractors alike as the grand proof or despoiling disproof of Joseph Smith's divine calling. People faced the choice of declaring faith in the Book of Mormon and dying or denying it and living. The book thus became a tangible reverse symbol of death and life, in real time.

Jeffrey R. Chadwick has taken readers into the world of tiny ancient objects called seals. Such items held special significance for owners since they often repeated the owner's name and served as a guarantee that goods or messages delivered with the seal's impression on them were genuinely from the sender. One such seal, with evident connections to Israelite royalty, preserves a form of the name *Mulek*. Chadwick examines the possibility that this seal might have belonged to the son of King Zedekiah who fled with supporters to the New World, where their descendants eventually were joined by descendants of the Lehite colony (see Omni 1:14–16; Helaman 8:21).

Happy reading!