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The Editor's Notebook

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Title The Editor's Notebook

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Abstract Summary of current issue.

THE EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK

Early illuminating studies on the Book of Mormon attempted to reach inside its world and uncover some of its social and cultural dimensions. One thinks of Hugh Nibley's *An Approach to the Book of Mormon* that first appeared in 1957 as a guide for Melchizedek Priesthood instruction. Since then, of course, a bundle of publications have skillfully disclosed elements of this record. Two studies in this issue of the *Journal* push against the frontiers of what we can know about norms and customs among the people who composed the record, much as Richard Bushman's important study on aspects of political life in the Book of Mormon did ("The Book of Mormon and the American Revolution," *BYU Studies* 17 [1976]). Val Larsen's article suggestively links the killing of Laban to the first manifestation of a nation's power to deal with persons who have breached law in a severe way. In this case, of course, the Lord impelled Nephi toward executing Laban. In Larsen's view, this was effectively the first act of state. And the Nephite state would be established on divine principles and those principles would include capital punishment, largely in harmony with Old Testament practices (see Alma 1:15; 51:17-19). Ryan Davis's piece draws attention to the power of people in a democracy to influence whether their nation goes to war or not. Bringing forward modern studies on the subject, Davis argues that the Book of Mormon shows an uncanny connection between democracy and peace. This connection is meaningful for grasping an important outcome of the ancient Nephite experiment with a form of democracy.

Two other studies rest on a close reading of the text. John S. Welch leads readers back to an issue that both illustrates the Book of Mormon's rich textual legacy and invites a reexamination of previous conclusions. The appearance of the terms *strait* and *straight* has generated earlier studies. In his meticulous way, Welch tries his hand at solving the proper reading of these words in key passages, arguing that the current reading of those passages in the published Book of Mormon stands closest to the original, intended sense. For his part, David Cummings looks inside the pages of the New Testament gospels and finds an ambiguous picture about how long

Jesus' body lay in the tomb. He then examines notices within the Book of Mormon that tie to Jesus' entombment and concludes that these notices point to a crucifixion date of Thursday rather than Friday in light of Jesus' resurrection on a Sunday.

In his last contribution to the *Journal* before stepping aside as its editor, Kent Brown has tried to solve the question about the likely locale of the Valley of Lemuel. The question persists because interested investigators have come to differing conclusions about its location in northwest Arabia. Building on his long-held interest in the journey of Lehi and Sariah, he looks at both the external geographical evidence and the internal textual evidence and concludes that the narrow canyon, Wadi Tayyib al-Ism, which lies some 75 miles south of modern Aqaba and features a "continually running" stream, fits the evidence best.

In contrast to all, Larry Morris turns toward Oliver Cowdery's earliest connections to the family of Joseph Smith and to the rapidly unfolding events of the restoration, bringing attention to moments that involved Oliver and also influenced the translation of the Book of Mormon. Employing his usual deft touch, Morris uncovers the links that came to bind Oliver to the youthful prophet and his work, leading him to become the main scribe in writing the pages of the Book of Mormon as Joseph Smith dictated them.