



1-31-2006

The Editor's Notebook

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Brown, S. Kent (2006) "The Editor's Notebook," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*: Vol. 15 : No. 1 , Article 2.
Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jbms/vol15/iss1/2>

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NEAL A. MAXWELL INSTITUTE
FOR RELIGIOUS SCHOLARSHIP

BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY • PROVO, UTAH

Title The Editor's Notebook

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Reference *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 15/1 (2006): 3.

ISSN 1065-9366 (print), 2168-3158 (online)

Abstract Summary of current issue.

THE EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK

Only rarely does one witness a truly monumental effort to shed light on an important document. The newly named Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship is pleased to bring notice to this kind of study in the pages of its *Journal*. Such is the case with Royal Skousen's work on the text of the Book of Mormon. Published so far in six massive tomes, with more to come, Skousen's meticulous scholarship has set out in typescript fashion the verses that remain from the original manuscript written by scribes at Joseph Smith's dictation, in one volume, and the entire printer's manuscript that was copied from the original for the printer's use, in two. Paired with these are his voluminous yet painstakingly careful reviews of the variant readings that have made their way into the text throughout the printing history of the Book of Mormon in English. To date, three of six planned parts in this long study of variants have seen the light of day.

Because of this project's historic significance, the editors of the *Journal* invited a bevy of scholars, representing different disciplines and points of view, to review Skousen's *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part One: Title Page, Witness Statements, 1 Nephi 1 – 2 Nephi 10*, published by FARMS in July 2004. After our invitation was accepted by five blue-ribbon scholars, part 2 of Skousen's *Analysis* appeared (in July 2005), covering the text from 2 Nephi 11 through Mosiah 16. Our reviewers have limited themselves to part 1, but their astute observations about Skousen's efforts most certainly apply to parts 2 and 3 and the volumes that will follow.

To assist with coordinating the five reviews and determining how best to present them in the *Journal*, the editors engaged the skills of Dr. M. Gerald Bradford, associate executive director of the Maxwell Institute and formerly an associate editor of the *Journal*. He has brought his usual superb abilities to the task. With his able assistance, we present the resulting reviews, which take very dissimilar angles when engaging Skousen's work. To say the least, the character of this issue is very different from that of any other.

Gracing these pages are two more studies, each with a significant viewpoint. Robert Rees's piece keeps the spotlight on the Book of Mormon in modern times. His interest has to do with the claim that, in dictating the text, Joseph Smith was simply engaging in "automatic writing," a phenomenon documented in a number of clinical studies wherein a person seems to be almost captured by some beyond-consciousness force or personality that inspires a stream of insight that the person does not possess naturally. Dr. Rees deftly presses this view to see whether it discloses anything about Joseph Smith's experience in translating the plates, and after shaking and wringing it thoroughly, he finds that the Prophet's own explanation of his experience satisfies the evidence much more tightly than does any claim of automatic writing.

Steven Olsen comes to the pages of the *Journal* for the first time. He engages a broad question about the influences controlling the historical narrative of the Book of Mormon. What was guiding Mormon as he selected materials to add to his story? Is the steering principle, or set of principles, discoverable? What is the relationship between Mormon's framework for his account and its content? With a refined sense developed through years of working with original historical materials, Dr. Olsen bends his best efforts to identifying the motives that lie behind Mormon's presentation.

As in the past, the *Journal* remains dependent on and grateful for authors who have willingly brought their skills to bear on the Book of Mormon, whose pages continue to yield treasures to the patient, observant researcher.