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A Journal of Book of Mormon Studies Retrospective: Twenty-Five Years of Scholarship

Adapted from Jacob D. Rawlins. “*Journal Retrospective: Perspective from the Editors.*” *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 18/2 (2009): 52–57.

IN 1992, WHEN STEPHEN D. RICKS PROPOSED a new academic journal focusing on the Book of Mormon, his goal was to encourage serious research on the Book of Mormon and publish that research for the widest possible audience. Through the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS), Ricks, along with John W. Welch, Daniel C. Peterson, and others, had already been participating for years in publishing a newsletter, research updates, and important books, including John Sorenson’s seminal *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* and the first volumes of the *Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*. The new journal, however, would be something different—in Ricks’s words, “a forum devoted to the serious and faithful study of the Book of Mormon in its historical, linguistic, cultural, and theological context.”

The first volume of the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* delivered on the vision Ricks had for the new publication. Eleven scholars contributed articles on a wide range of topics—including geography, economics, customs, cultures, laws and legal systems, and language studies. Subsequent issues of the *Journal* followed the same pattern: Faithful scholars from diverse disciplines used their expertise to contribute to the academic study of the Book of Mormon. During Ricks’s six-year tenure as editor,

more than 140 articles were published in the *Journal*—an unprecedented amount of diverse scholarship on the Book of Mormon.

In 1998, John L. Sorenson succeeded Ricks as the editor of the *Journal*. While Sorenson wished to continue the tradition of excellent scholarship, he felt that the *Journal* had potential to reach a far wider audience. He proposed a change in the *Journal's* format, from the traditional 6" × 9", unillustrated format to a larger, illustrated presentation that would appeal to an expanded readership. In Sorenson's words, "the plan was to seek competent Book of Mormon scholars willing to present first-rate scholarship in accessible language and in a visually attractive format." In addition to attracting a larger audience, Sorenson also desired a larger, more diverse pool of contributors. He worked tirelessly to encourage scholars from many parts of the world to write articles for the *Journal*. During his time as editor, more than fifty different scholars contributed articles; many of these scholars were not affiliated with BYU. Sorenson also introduced a feature entitled "Out of the Dust," which highlighted new discoveries with relevance to the Book of Mormon.

In 2002, after four years as editor, Sorenson passed the editorship of the *Journal* to S. Kent Brown, who had served as associate editor under Sorenson. Brown built on Sorenson's expanded vision for the *Journal*. As part of his own efforts to broaden the range of the articles in the *Journal*, Brown invited a number of diverse scholars to serve on the board of associate editors or on the editorial advisory board. Brown wrote, "In time, the *Journal* enjoyed the supporting commitment of an international group of historians and linguists and anthropologists and literary savants who served on one or the other board." Also during Brown's tenure, the focus of the *Journal* expanded to include articles on early LDS Church history (especially regarding the coming forth of the Book of Mormon), translations of the Book of Mormon into other languages, and early missionary work. Additionally, it included for the first time a recurring feature that spotlighted individual conversion stories.

After Brown's six years as its editor, the *Journal* had become the premier publication of the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, which was organized in 2006 to include FARMS and other departments.

Brown's retirement and Andrew H. Hedges's appointment as the new editor allowed the Maxwell Institute to reevaluate the mission and scope of the *Journal*. Topics covered in its pages ranged widely beginning from the first issue, but developments over the years had broadened the scope to include topics related to LDS scripture and history that did not necessarily touch on the Book of Mormon. Hedges proposed a formal expansion of the *Journal*, with a name change (to *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Restoration Scripture*), to include all restoration scripture—Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price—as well as other material from church history (such as the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible and material from the ongoing Joseph Smith Papers Project). Unfortunately for the *Journal*, Hedges received an assignment to work on the Joseph Smith Papers Project, which cut short his tenure as editor after only one year. He nonetheless oversaw the transformation of the scope of the *Journal*.

In 2009, Paul Y. Hoskisson became the editor of the *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* and continued the tradition of encouraging scholarship on the Book of Mormon from a variety of backgrounds. Hoping to reintroduce significant but often overlooked articles to *Journal* readers, he initiated a repeating feature, “Worthy of Another Look: Classics from the Past.” In particular, he showcased several articles from Hugh Nibley, including a richly illustrated version of “The Early Christian Prayer Circle” (2010). Hoskisson also encouraged young LDS artists, commissioning original artwork from Emily Gordon, Annie Henrie, and Elspeth Young. As editor, Hoskisson, with his patient attention to detail, approved illustrations that were both relevant and accurate.

Upon Hoskisson's retirement from Brigham Young University in 2014, Brian M. Hauglid assumed the editorship of the *Journal*. With an eye to increased interest in the Book of Mormon from the larger non-Mormon academy, Hauglid and his associate editors not only restored the *Journal's* original name—*Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*—and focus, but have made a concerted effort to include more non-Latter-day Saint scholars as contributors, reviewers, and editorial

board members and to ensure that the *Journal* plays a role in the larger world of Mormon studies, which is rapidly becoming an established (if nonetheless still formative) feature of the academic world. Further, partly in response to the reformulation of the *FARMS Review* as the *Mormon Studies Review*, Hauglid has introduced a book review section to the *Journal* for the first time and has appointed an associate editor in charge of reviews. The *Journal*, in addition to publishing full-length articles, has now reintroduced shorter notes (similar to those found in the earliest issues) that are meant to outline possibilities for further research rather than to make a definitive contribution. Hauglid and his editorial team look forward to the future of Book of Mormon studies with great optimism.

The design and format of the *Journal* over the years have been enhanced by the talents of Michael P. Lyon, art consultant; P. Brandon Jameson, Brigham Young University Publications and Graphics; Bjorn W. Pendleton; Stephen Hales Creative, Inc.; and Andrew Heiss. Production editors have included Don L. Brugger, Alison V. P. Coutts, Jacob D. Rawlins, and Shirley S. Ricks.

Significant Issues

While each issue of the *Journal* has had significant articles that have furthered scholarship on the Book of Mormon, certain issues stand out as milestones in the *Journal's* history.

Issue 1/1 (1992). The first issue of the *Journal* represents a landmark in publications on the Book of Mormon. Not only was it the beginning of a new wave of LDS scholarship, but it also contained some of the most significant articles published on the Book of Mormon, which stand up to scrutiny even twenty-five years later.

Issue 4/1 (1995). In 1995, the editors of the *Journal* paid tribute to the late Sidney B. Sperry, who, along with Hugh Nibley and John Sorenson, pioneered the systematic study of the Book of

Mormon. This issue contained tributes, memorials, a bibliography, and twenty-five of Sperry's articles on the Book of Mormon.

Issue 7/1 (1998). When John Sorenson took over the editorship of the *Journal*, he initiated a change to a larger format, complete with extensive color illustrations, including both photographs and fine artwork. Sorenson did not, however, abandon the academic rigor applied to earlier issues of the *Journal*. This first issue in the new format introduced a discussion on Lehi's trail and the location of Nephi's Bountiful that has continued in the pages of the *Journal*.

Issue 9/2 (2000). In a short article near the back of *JBMS* 9/2, John Sorenson addressed the difficulty of using DNA to establish any sort of link between modern native Americans and the peoples of the Book of Mormon—years before opponents of the Book of Mormon attempted to apply DNA evidence to Book of Mormon claims. Sorenson's work was later expanded and supported by geneticists and DNA scientists in *JBMS* 12/1.

Issue 13/1–2 (2004). One of several themed issues produced during Kent Brown's editorship, this issue focused on the Hill Cumorah, including articles on its location, history, traditions, and the Hill Cumorah Pageant.

Issue 15/2 (2006). In another themed issue, Kent Brown presented the views of various scholars on Lehi's trail from Jerusalem to the land Bountiful, where they launched the ship that would take them to the promised land.

Issue 17/1–2 (2008). Under its new editor, Andrew Hedges, the *Journal* once again underwent a transformation—in title, scope, and design. This new beginning for the *Journal* represented an expansion of the original vision set forth by Stephen Ricks.

Issue 22/2 (2013). The final issue prepared by Paul Hoskisson encapsulated his vision as editor by showcasing the ambitious contributions of young talent—both artistic and scholarly—and

seamlessly weaving them together with the work of seasoned professionals. This richly illustrated issue also served as an elegant capstone to the format changes initiated by John Sorenson during his tenure as editor.

Issue 23 (2014). Under a new team of editors led by Brian Hauglid, the *Journal* reverted to its original title and black-and-white, 6" × 9" format. It now features full-length essays, review essays, and notes based on faithful, serious research directed to both believers and nonbelievers.

Editors' Perspectives

The following statements were written at different times by the *Journal* editors.

Stephen D. Ricks



The *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* originated in discussions among John W. Welch, Daniel C. Peterson, and myself in 1992. We decided to found the *Journal* as a forum devoted to the serious and faithful study of the Book of Mormon in its historical, linguistic, cultural, and theological context. It took next to no time coming up with the title of the journal, *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, and it has, I am happy to say, stuck through many years.

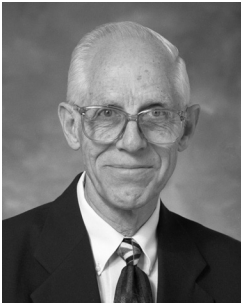
We brought our proposal to the board of directors of the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, who approved it, along with our board of editors, which included Kay P. Edwards, Robert L. Millet, Donald W. Parry, and David R. Seely (we later added Brian Hauglid and Gaye Strathearn).

Intending to be “no respecter of persons” in our selection of papers to be included in forthcoming issues, we did not insist that those publishing in the *Journal* have certain academic credentials. We did,

however, ask that the work be rigorous, carefully thought out, and well presented. At first we advertised for submissions—even soliciting some papers—but since the significance of a journal devoted to this particular subject caught on, it has taken on a life of its own.

While I enjoyed all the articles published during my tenure as editor, I am most pleased that the *Journal* became a forum for investigations of proper names and their origins in the Book of Mormon (a topic I hope to turn into a book-length study). Through the years, the *Journal* has continued the vision we first presented to the FARMS Board in 1992. I hope to see that work continue for many more years to come.

John L. Sorenson



When Stephen Ricks and others launched the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* in the fall of 1992, I enthusiastically supported the idea and the effort by contributing a significant piece (“When Lehi’s Party Arrived, Did They Find Others in the Land?”) that appeared as the first article in volume 1, number 1.

I was still an enthusiast upon learning in 1997 that a follow-on editor was being sought. Feeling that the publication had not yet reached its potential, I presented a proposal to the officers of FARMS to serve as the new editor, under certain conditions. First, I would require the aid of two mature associate editors, S. Kent Brown and M. Gerald Bradford. The second condition was that the format of the *Journal* be substantially changed in order to attract an expanded readership. Taking *Scientific American* as a general model, the plan was to seek competent Book of Mormon scholars willing to present first-rate scholarship in accessible language and in a visually attractive format.

Acceptance of the proposal implied that substantially more FARMS resources would be directed toward preparing the *Journal*. In fact, it became the flagship publication of the Foundation that would go to all member/subscribers twice per year.

Secondary concerns at that stage were to invite a widened range of writers to contribute and to assist them to prepare their articles at an appropriate level of clarity and rigor. The visual quality of the *Journal* depended on the talent of excellent designers, particularly Bjorn Pendleton. In some cases specific works of art began to be commissioned for use in the *Journal*.

An additional goal was to increase the variety of contributors. In three and one-half years the work of 35 different authors was published, half of them located at places other than BYU.

Those who have invested effort in the *Journal* can look forward to progress in future publishing of not only articles on the Book of Mormon, but also now on a wider range of scholarship on the other restoration scriptures.

S. Kent Brown



How do I characterize my editorial years with the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*? I was introduced to this world through John L. Sorenson, who succeeded the first editor, Stephen D. Ricks. Dr. Sorenson graciously invited me to be one of his associate editors in 1997. I was thrilled to be able to work with someone of Dr. Sorenson's abilities and interests. When he stepped aside after four years, I accepted the invitation from FARMS to succeed him. I felt that I could do no better than to hold the *Journal* in the channel that he had carved.

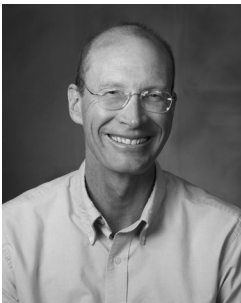
My interests largely mirrored those of my two predecessors—to broaden the range of topics covered by the *Journal* (that is, to explore both the ancient dimensions of the text and the modern story of the Book of Mormon) and to stretch the pool of contributors. In this light, my first task was to invite not only a diverse group to serve on the board of associate editors, but also an equally diverse group to act as an editorial advisory board. In time, the *Journal* enjoyed the supporting commitment of an international group of historians and linguists and

anthropologists and literary savants who served on one or the other board. For me, it was a very satisfying moment when the last person on my list said yes.

In retrospect, what would I judge to be the most significant issue of the *Journal*? Perhaps I could measure by the fact that we completely ran out of one issue, the one that dealt in large measure with the question of DNA and Native American origins (*JBMS* 12/1). I do not take credit for inaugurating the issue of the *Journal* that dealt with this question. The suggestion came from John Sorenson, who correctly anticipated that the question of DNA and its ability, or inability, to solve questions that tie to Book of Mormon origins would become important.

Naturally, the whole effort to put together issues of the *Journal* was filled with little disappointments and joyful triumphs. With this said, the biggest payoff for me was the deepened relationships with people who made efforts to submit studies or contributed their time to the editorial process by reviewing studies in the early stages. I am forever in their debt.

Andrew Hedges



The *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* was first published in 1992, under the editorial direction of Stephen D. Ricks. In the seventh year, John L. Sorenson, as the *Journal's* new editor, changed its format to make the contents more accessible to specialist and nonspecialist readers alike. Under the direction of Sorenson's successor, S. Kent Brown, the *Journal* has continued to feature first-rate scholarship on the Book of Mormon, often accompanied by beautiful visual aids and images. Thanks to these scholars' vision and editorial skills, thousands of people now enjoy the *Journal* either as subscribers or through the Internet, where they are able to stay abreast of the best that scholarship has to offer on the Book of Mormon.

Partly as a result of the *Journal's* success, and partly in answer to the apparent need for a scholarly, faithful venue in which other latter-day

scriptures could regularly be discussed, with volume 17, the *Journal's* scope was expanded to include all of what might be termed “Restoration Scripture”—those books of Latter-day Saint scripture and related texts that were revealed through the ministry of the Prophet Joseph Smith. These include the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, the Pearl of Great Price, and the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible. With the expansion in scope came a name change, to the *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Restoration Scripture*—“the Book of Mormon” being retained in the title not only to help provide a sense of continuity with the former title but also in recognition of that book’s continuing role as the keystone of the Mormon faith.

Our hope is that the *Journal* will continue to be a venue where scholars from a variety of backgrounds can explore, discuss, and even debate important topics relating to the texts, contexts, and meaning of latter-day scripture. We believe that part of this includes reexamining and unpacking familiar assumptions and arguments—even those that have found their best expression in past issues of the *Journal* and related publications. We believe, too, that there are many topics yet to be explored in both the Book of Mormon and other restoration scriptures and hope contributors and readers alike will consider the *Journal* a fitting venue for introducing new subjects and directions for study.

Paul Y. Hoskisson



It is always easier to build on the great work of previous editors. I thanked them many times in my mind for leaving me a thriving and superior journal. It was hard to follow such competent scholars, and therefore I made no effort to make substantial changes. While maintaining faithful approaches to the scriptures of the restoration, as my predecessors had done, I did make it a policy to publish fresh voices in the field who came with new, sometimes quite unique perspectives.

In the few short years that I was editor of the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies and Other Restoration Scripture*, I also tried to showcase young, new Latter-day Saint artists and illustrators with their never-before-published work. In addition, I introduced a new section to the journal devoted to the republishing of classic LDS scholarly writing, especially of articles that may not have been so well known or that had made a significant contribution to the field.

Brian M. Hauglid



Over the past twenty-five years, the *Journal* has gone through changes in name, focus, format, and style. But through all these iterations the editors have consistently tried to retain its foundational mission to be “a forum devoted to the serious and faithful study of the Book of Mormon in its historical, linguistic, cultural, and theological context.”

At the outset of my editorship (2014), in consultation with the executive director, M. Gerald Bradford, and many others, it was determined that the *Journal* name would revert to the original *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*. This change occurred primarily to underscore the unique place the Book of Mormon holds as sacred scripture within the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. We also wanted to highlight this by going back to the original vision of Stephen Ricks to dedicate a journal solely to the study of the Book of Mormon.

With my associate editors Mark Alan Wright and Joseph M. Spencer, we thought it necessary to build on the vision of Ricks to produce faithful, serious scholarship and to go one step further to subject future contributions to the *Journal* to the highest standards of both LDS and non-LDS peer review to attain the highest levels of academic quality. In doing this we realize that the reach of the *Journal* may be smaller than what John Sorenson envisioned. But we believe Book of Mormon studies stands on the precipice of acceptance within the larger academic community, especially as it reaches out to non-LDS scholars. We see this beginning to happen with non-LDS scholarship from respected scholars

such as Laurie Maffly-Kipp, Paul Gutjahr, and John Christopher Thomas, who have produced serious Book of Mormon research for the academy.

All three periodicals of the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship (*Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity*, and *Mormon Studies Review*) have now been standardized as annual journals of similar size and format. In addition, the three journals each have both LDS and non-LDS scholars serving on their editorial boards.

As editors of the *Journal*, we are committed to producing high-quality articles from a variety of scholars who, we believe, will faithfully and seriously bring Book of Mormon studies to a respectable place for Latter-day Saint scholarship and the academy at large.