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Abstract Review of "Hugh Nibley's Footnotes" (2008), by Ronald V. Huggins.

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Review of Ronald V. Huggins. "Hugh Nibley's Footnotes." In *Salt Lake City Messenger* 110 (May 2008): 9–21.

> There is no incentive . . . to question an author/historian, with whom he or she agrees.[1]

In this article Ronald Huggins[2] questions the accuracy and validity of Hugh Nibley's use of his sources. He claims that "Nibley's misuse of sources goes beyond seeing things in them that aren't there" and that he "regularly modifies his quotations to artificially render them more supportive of the arguments he is trying to make. He sometimes

1. Columbia College Conservative Club, "Bellesiles's Case Shows Need for Institutional Reform in Bancroft Committee and Columbia History Department," 18 December 2002, www.ocshooters.com/Reports/Arming_America/arming_america.htm#cuprize (accessed 8 September 2008).

2. Ronald Huggins is an associate professor of theological and historical studies at the Salt Lake Theological Seminary. He also directs the master of arts program in theological studies. However, according to Jessica Ravitz, "Salt Lake Theological Seminary Set to Close," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 28 October 2008, the seminary will be closing at the end of this academic year due to economic challenges. It is unclear at this point what Huggins's professional future will hold. Given the amount of writing he has done in recent issues of the *Salt Lake City Messenger*, perhaps he will end up working at the Utah Lighthouse Ministry. He obtained his doctorate (ThD) from Wycliffe College at the University of Toronto. His areas of expertise include New Testament (specializing in the synoptic problem and Pauline studies) and church history (specializing in patristics and American religious history). See www.slts.edu/Faculty/huggins.htm (accessed 10 September 2008).

mistranslates them . . . or else translates them in very strange and unjustified ways" (p. 10).[3]

Nature of the Attacks, Arguments, and Allegations

Huggins does not seem to be concerned here with an additional charge that has been leveled at Nibley's footnotes—namely, that of sloppy, botched, or incomplete citations. Anyone who has source checked Nibley's footnotes will grant that there is some truth to this claim. Nibley made just about every kind of error possible in those citations: wrong page numbers, wrong years, even wrong authors, incomplete information, lack of article titles, and so forth, but, more often than not, when a particularly intractable source was finally located, Nibley's citation made some sense, with typographical errors often bearing some blame.

Huggins seems, rather, to be concerned with Nibley's possible misquotations or mistranslations: "I use the term 'misquote' to mean

3. Huggins's article was first submitted for publication in *Dialogue*, but it never appeared in its pages. Perhaps in response to the peer reviews of that earlier version, Huggins changed some wording throughout and altered paragraphs (e.g., p. 9). He gives credit to an early reviewer for correcting the usage of a Greek verb (p. 17 n. 53), so he did have access to those reviews (whether in full or in summary). He added new material discussing claims of John Gee and Kent Jackson, praising Nibley for inspiring a rising generation of scholars, and also complaining about the difficulty of common people being able to check Nibley's obscure sources in languages other than English (when an English version was available) (pp. 9–11). (Nibley was not very patient with those who had not "paid their dues" and studied the languages for themselves. "About twenty years ago, a student named Michael Carter said that he pestered Nibley with questions one day for about an hour. After that time, Nibley, obviously growing impatient with the continued questioning, muttered something that Carter could not understand. When Carter asked what he had said, Nibley responded: 'Is it my fault you don't speak Icelandic?'" John Gee, personal communication, 3 October 2008.) He added some clarifications of his arguments (e.g., pp. 11, 12), including a grammatical explanation (p. 17). Huggins dropped a page and a half of his discussion of Nibley's use of passages from Eusebius's *Preparation for the Gospel* (would have been between pp. 15 and 16); a paragraph in his discussion of the Shepherd of Hermas (would have been on p. 16); and a section on Origen's *First Principles* (would have been on p. 17); and he replaced the three-and-a-half-page conclusion of his original manuscript—in which he suggested further problems with Nibley's footnotes—with a new ending entitled "Nibley's Defenders" (discussing Daniel Peterson and John Gee) (pp. 19–21).

to misrepresent in any way, e.g., by adding to or taking away from a passage, asserting that it means something other than it does, reading things into it, or mistranslating it" (p. 10). Using as a springboard Martha Beck's claimed encounter in a supermarket with a "man in tweed" who informs her that her father made up 90 percent of his footnotes,[4] Huggins claims that Nibley misrepresents various early Christian sources in his translations.

He also claims that Nibley misquotes several sources at one stroke in his "The Passing of the Primitive Church."[5] In his discussion of this article, Huggins quotes R. M. Grant as complaining that "Nibley had 'not always taken into account the context of the Fathers' statements or for that matter their use of homiletical rhetoric'" (p. 16). However, Huggins neglects to set this complaint in the wider context of scholarly debate that appeared in the pages of *Church History* following the appearance of Nibley's article.[6]

In a review of the newest volume in the Collected Works of Hugh Nibley—*Eloquent Witness: Nibley on Himself, Others, and the Temple*—Jeff Needle, a non-Mormon, acknowledges:

4. Martha Beck, *Leaving the Saints: How I Lost the Mormons and Found My Faith* (New York: Crown, 2005), 164–67. This claim can only be based on Martha's "source," for she personally never could have checked her father's notes for herself—it took a dozen checkers about five years to check three-fourths of Nibley's notes in the Collected Works of Hugh Nibley. One paragraph that was dropped from the second page of Huggins's original manuscript reveals his candid opinion of Nibley's footnotes: "My conclusions might as well be stated up front: what Tweedy claims is what I have found to be true myself. In addition, although Tweedy's 90% figure may be too high, one does find oneself encountering problems with Nibley's use of his sources alarmingly often" (would have been on p. 9).

5. However, the three pages in the original manuscript detailing how Nibley may have misused these eight sources have been dropped—perhaps the publishers felt the article was long enough without that section. Huggins's claim that these sources may not have all been relevant reveals something of Nibley's footnoting practices. Often, Nibley would insert a footnote with sources for only the final word or phrase of a sentence, not the entire idea. He would also give as many supplementary sources as he could think of in case anyone wished to pursue the topic further—since he read so widely, these lists of sources sometimes seemed irrelevant but, I'm sure, were all pertinent in his ordered mind.

6. For the story of this debate, see William A. Clebsch, "History and Salvation: An Essay in Distinctions," in *The Study of Religion in Colleges and Universities*, ed. Paul Ramsey and John F. Wilson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), 40–72, esp. 70, where Clebsch says "the issue was settled—by assertion—according to Nibley's prediction."

> I am not unaware of the criticisms that have been hurled at Dr. Nibley, both before and after his death. . . .
>
> And I know that some have questioned the quality of Nibley's scholarship. Did he tend to be sloppy in his research? Were his footnotes a nightmare to verify? Did he make stuff up out of whole cloth? All of these charges have been hurled at him. His defenders ignore the charges. His detractors thrill at the thought of bringing down this most prominent of Mormon scholars.[7]

Showing an awareness of these issues but not responding to them, Needle goes on to declare that "this volume is not so much about scholarship, research, or any academic concern," although they "are reflected here. But the thrust of this book is to introduce to readers the man, Hugh Nibley."

One indication that the issue of the accuracy of Nibley's footnotes has been around for some time is the fact that the following question has been posed and responded to on a FAIR Web site: "I've heard that Hugh Nibley really just faked or distorted most of his footnotes. Is there any truth to this?" A thoughtful response follows.[8]

My Approach

I wish here to clarify the purpose of footnotes in scholarly publications and discuss their accuracy in other publications as well as in Nibley's writings. I will describe the process used in checking his notes and share experiences of source checkers with Nibley's notes. Rather than resurrect all the material that has previously been brought to bear on this issue, I will quote from just a few earlier sources but will provide references in notes for interested readers.[9] I will present several

7. Jeffrey Needle, review of *Eloquent Witness: Nibley on Himself, Others, and the Temple*, www.ldsbooklovers.com/bookreview.asp?rid=199&bid=2298&pid=0 (accessed 26 August 2008).

8. See "Hugh Nibley/Footnotes," at en.fairmormon.org/Hugh_Nibley:Footnotes (accessed 8 September 2008). This shows that Needles's claim that "his defenders ignore the charges" is not true.

9. See Kent P. Jackson, review of *Old Testament and Related Studies*, by Hugh Nibley, *BYU Studies* 28/4 (1988): 114–19; a rebuttal to Jackson is in Louis Midgley, "Hugh Winder

new statements that I have gathered and will also turn to Nibley's own writings in his defense. As he is not here to defend himself in person, it seems appropriate to cite relevant passages that he has written.

The Functions of Footnotes

Authors are expected to give information in their footnotes that is complete, clear, and relevant so a future reader or researcher can find the original sources and thereby validate (or question) the author's claims and perhaps build upon that research in advancing scholarship or improving knowledge. "Any paper based on the writings of others should acknowledge the sources used. Not only is it common courtesy and honesty to give credit where credit is due, but it is a sign of scrupulousness to tell the source of a statement, so that a reader can judge for himself the evidence it is based on."[10] Modern historians must "perform two complementary tasks. They must examine all the sources relevant to the solution of a problem and construct a new narrative or argument from them. The footnote proves that both tasks have been carried out."[11] The *Chicago Manual of Style* reminds us: "Ethics, copyright laws, and courtesy to readers require authors to identify the sources of direct quotations and of any facts or opinions not generally known or easily checked."[12] Andy Guess, in an article evaluating the use and accuracy of footnotes, explains: "Theoretically, scholarly references serve a dual purpose: They indicate an author's

Nibley: Bibliography and Register," in *By Study and Also by Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh W. Nibley on the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday, 27 March 1990*, ed. John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 1:lxxi–lxxiii; Kent P. Jackson, review of *Leaving the Saints: How I Lost the Mormons and Found My Faith*, by Martha Beck, *FARMS Review* 17/1 (2005): 107–22; Boyd J. Petersen, "Response to *Leaving the Saints*," *FARMS Review* 17/2 (2005): 217–51, citing e-mail correspondence from Todd Compton, Glen Cooper, John Gee, William Hamblin, and Stephen Ricks; Robert L. Millet, "'They Leave It, but They Can't Leave It Alone': The Memoir of a Disaffected Mormon," *Books & Culture* 11/4 (July–August 2005): 33.

10. Porter G. Perrin, *Writer's Guide and Index to English*, 4th ed. (Chicago: Scott, Foresman, 1965), 438.

11. Anthony Grafton, *The Footnote: A Curious History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 4–5.

12. *Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 16.1. This volume is the publishing industry's standard.

familiarity with established literature and assign credit to previous work, while from the other direction many would argue they signal a paper's relevance and standing within a discipline."[13] Since scholarly publications are intended to build upon previous knowledge and findings, it is incumbent on academic authors to provide references to works they quote or consult. This is all part of the system in which scholars present their findings to see if their conclusions will be accepted, rejected, or adapted.

Accuracy of Footnotes in General

Guess, acknowledging that citations are "far from perfect," notes that "researchers tend to cite papers that support their conclusions and downplay or ignore work that calls them into question. . . . Maybe they overlook research written in other languages, or aren't familiar with relevant work in a related but different field, or spelled an author's name wrong, or listed the wrong journal."[14] Guess refers to work by Malcolm Wright and Scott Armstrong, who divided problem citations into two categories: "incorrect references" and "quotation errors." Looking at the medical field, they determined of the former type that "31 percent of the references in public health journals contained errors, and three percent of these were so severe that the referenced material could not be located"; they also cited studies that "42 percent of references in dental journals were inaccurate—30 percent of these were major errors, such as incorrect journal titles, article titles, or authors"—and that other medical journals had 32 to 67 percent error rates. "This problem is serious even for the most prestigious journals."[15] This seems to be the sort of botched citation that Huggins is not particularly concerned with in Nibley's works.

13. Andy Guess, "Cite Check," *Inside Higher Ed*, 8 July 2008, www.insidehighered.com/news/2008/07/08/citation (accessed 8 September 2008). My thanks to John Gee for leading me to this Web site and related information.

14. Andy Guess, "Cite Check."

15. Malcolm Wright and J. Scott Armstrong, "The Ombudsman: Verification of Citations: Fawlty Towers of Knowledge?" *Interfaces* 38/2 (2008): 126.

But, as Wright and Armstrong correctly recognize, "more serious . . . are articles that incorrectly quote a cited paper or, as the authors put it, 'misreport findings.'"[16] They detail this second type of problem in this same study: "authors' descriptions of previous studies in public health journals differed from the original copy in 30 percent of references; half of these descriptions were unrelated to the quoting authors' contentions."[17] Wright and Armstrong believe their findings in health literature reflect problems in other scientific fields, and this misreporting is the type that Huggins takes issue with Nibley on.

Generally speaking, authors retain ultimate responsibility for their citations. Regarding footnote accuracy, I find such statements as "Please check every footnote to ensure substantive and technical accuracy. Any statement of fact or law should have a footnote."[18] "Confirm that the list of references has been checked carefully for accuracy and that each of the references has been read by at least one of the authors."[19] "Manuscripts will not be accepted for publication unless all footnotes and citations are in compliance with a *Uniform System of Citation*, 18th edition. The author is responsible for compliance with this system of citation and footnote accuracy."[20] And even our own style guide for the *FARMS Review* asks the author to sign the following statement: "I have verified the accuracy of all quotations from other sources (including scriptures) that I have cited in my review." I must admit, however, that having our authors sign such a statement does not relieve them of the responsibility of providing photocopies of their sources for us so we can check their citations carefully. Many, if not most, publishing houses no longer have the resources to provide source-checking services; at the Maxwell Institute, however, we feel strongly that checking the notes of our publications is something

16. Andy Guess, "Cite Check," citing Wright and Armstrong, "Verification of Citations," 126.

17. Wright and Armstrong, "Verification of Citations," 126.

18. See www.usfca.edu/org/mlj/submissions/index.html for *Maritime Law Journal* submissions (accessed 8 September 2008).

19. Andy Guess, "Cite Check."

20. See www.blackwellpublishing.com/submit.asp?ref=0896-5811 for *Journal of Legal Studies Education* submissions (accessed 8 September 2008).

we owe to our readers (and our authors). And, yes, most submissions include errors of varying degrees of seriousness, despite the authors' claims of having verified their citations.

Clearly, these statements placing the responsibility with the authors reflect the ideal world. Anyone who has even briefly checked the notes of submitted papers has usually muttered (or worse) about authors who can't seem to get it right. Here is a rather amusing comment from a librarian (at a theological seminary, no less) about citation inaccuracy:

> Librarians' job security grows with citation inaccuracy, for their expertise, tools, and experience-informed hunches can yield results when people need to catch and correct errors, enhance impoverished citations, or identify and locate misquoted, badly cited, and/or elusive sources. At the same time, a librarian's keen frustration is the inaccurate citation that impedes direct retrieval or interlibrary loan. Usually the citation itself is the problem, not an error by the person seeking help.[21]

As an editor myself, I identify with the sentiments of this copyeditor:

> Anyone who has spent any time copyediting scholarly manuscripts . . . would not be surprised at all by this information about the high rate of incorrect citation. At first, as a beginning editor, I was appalled to find so many mistakes in the footnotes of senior scholars. . . . Who knows how many scholars have been spared from embarrassment by their copyeditors working quietly behind the scenes to repair their flawed writings?[22]

An Egregious Example of Misusing Sources

I have recently become aware of a published book—Michael A. Bellesiles's *Arming America: The Origins of a National Gun Culture*—

21. James Pakala, library director at Covenant Theological Seminary, 8 July 2008, at www.insidehighered.com/news/2008/07/08/citation (accessed 8 September 2008).

22. Sandy Thatcher, director, Penn State University Press, 8 July 2008, at www.insidehighered.com/news/2008/07/08/citation (accessed 8 September 2008).

that was awarded the Bancroft Prize in history in 2001. However, because other scholars and independent researchers showed Bellesiles's research to be inaccurate or even fraudulent, the award was rescinded in 2002 (the only time this has ever happened) and Bellesiles resigned from a tenured position at Emory University.[23]

One of Bellesiles's early critics, Clayton E. Cramer, noted vast differences between the author's conclusions and the literature he was familiar with on a similar topic from that time period. At first, Cramer graciously proposed various explanations to account for the differences: perhaps the sources reflected different regions of America; perhaps Bellesiles relied more on official sources and government documents; perhaps he began with a different set of assumptions—but then Cramer began to find "glaring discrepancies" between Bellesiles's "claims and what his sources actually said" and "incorrect quotations—and consistently incorrect in a direction that supported his thesis—never the other direction." He "found quotations taken so severely out of context that Bellesiles' use of them had completely inverted the author's meaning" and "that his representations of unambiguous primary and secondary sources were often completely the reverse of what they actually said."[24]

Ultimately, Cramer concluded that "the sources that Bellesiles cites . . . *never* support [his claim], and usually directly contradict it. In many cases, the most charitable assumption that can be made is that Bellesiles copied citations out of secondary works regarding gunpowder storage without bothering to check to see if they applied to firearms."[25] He said it was possible to "pick a page, any page" and find severe errors, "sometimes with the very first footnote. . . . It would appear that many of America's most prominent historians assumed

23. An account of this affair is found in Peter C. Hoffer, *Past Imperfect: Facts, Fictions, Fraud—American History from Bancroft and Parkman to Ambrose, Bellesiles, Ellis, and Goodwin* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), 141–71 ("Falsification: The Case of Michael Bellesiles).

24. Clayton E. Cramer, "Why Footnotes Matter: Checking *Arming America's* Claims," *Plagiary: Cross-Disciplinary Studies in Plagiarism, Fabrication, and Falsification* 1/11 (2006): 2.

25. Cramer, "Why Footnotes Matter," 7.

that if Professor Bellesiles made an astonishing factual claim, well, he must have looked it up, because *Arming America* is full of endnotes and an impressive sea of citations."[26]

Part of the concern over this widely publicized book and its subsequent disgrace arose because of its political implications—gun lobbyists had long claimed that weapons served an important part in colonial life, whereas Bellesiles was attempting to prove just the opposite.[27] The reason I bring this incident up is to illustrate that Huggins seems to echo many of the arguments used against Bellesiles's book to decry Nibley's work. Even so, I don't believe that Huggins is willing to pour the baby out with the bathwater—I don't believe he is proposing that nothing Nibley has written has merit.

Accuracy of Nibley's Notes

What this boils down to is the accuracy of Nibley's notes on two levels: the botched, incomplete citations and the misrepresentations. Perhaps here would be an appropriate place to review the source-checking process that has been used in attempting to verify Nibley's notes.[28] According to John W. Welch, who has been instrumental in the conception and publishing of the Collected Works of Hugh Nibley:

26. Cramer, "Why Footnotes Matter," 19–20. Another historical controversy of the 1980s involved the accusation that David Abraham had engaged in scholarship that "was not just deficient but fraudulent" in his book *The Collapse of the Weimar Republic: Political Economy and Crisis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981). Peter Novick details the events of this story in *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 612–21, quotation on p. 613. Abraham admitted to having committed careless errors but showed that "his argument was sustained at least as well by the corrected as by the original versions." Empiricists were infuriated that this demonstrated "the relative autonomy of the argument from details of the evidence" (Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 616–17).

27. For a recent example of a professor/political activist being fired, check details on the University of Colorado's Ward Churchill, who was accused of "research misconduct, including plagiarism, fabrication, and falsification"; see en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ward_Churchill_misconduct_issues (accessed 23 September 2008).

28. See the appendix to this article, pp. 289–91, to review what various introductions to individual volumes in the Collected Works have said on the matter of source checking and note accuracy.

> We assigned editors to begin working on each of the first ten volumes. One of the most important functions was to source check all of Nibley's quotes and footnotes. To do this, each editor made use of a large team of source checkers, who became known as the "Collected Workers of Hugh Nibley," wearing a t-shirt with that name.[29] Many of the source checkers were volunteers, but the mainstay of the source-checking effort were people who were hired as BYU students or friends of FARMS. . . . We were able to move expeditiously to put together a large temporary team, and between 1984 and 1989 we brought out nine volumes of the Collected Works, an unprecedented publishing feat.[30]

In 1988, Fran Clark joined the project to assist in transcribing, organizing, and managing the electronic versions of the materials, a massive task; Welch considers her arrival an answer to prayer. Clark also worked closely with Nibley himself as he made dictations for the (still) long-awaited *One Eternal Round*. As one of Clark's 1988 journal entries reveals, Nibley wasn't always the easiest person to work with:

> In time, I learned that if I wanted to make a change (one I knew would later need to be fixed), I would do it without consulting him. If it were one he needed to correct—like sentence form or a necessary footnote—I'd say, "I think *we* need a reference here," or "I think *I've* made a mistake." That way, he was still in charge, which he had to make clear to me from day one. After that was settled, he relaxed and we worked well together.[31]

29. I hesitate to begin naming names, for surely some will be left out, but some of the Collected Workers were Glen Cooper, James Fleugel (now deceased), John Gee, Fran Clark (Hafen), Andrew Hedges, Gary Keeley, Jill Keeley, Darrell Matthews, Daniel McKinlay, Janet McNeely, Brent McNeely, Tyler Moulton, Shirley Ricks, Stephen Ricks, Matthew Roper, Morgan Tanner, James Tredway, and John Welch. I should also mention here that Phyllis Nibley, Hugh's wife, always reads the manuscripts and makes excellent suggestions before they are published.

30. John W. Welch, e-mail correspondence, 11 August 2008.

31. Fran Clark (Hafen), journal entry, 7 August 1988, 1.

About this time James V. Tredway was asked to track the progress of each volume and keep the project moving along.[32] He relates in remarkable detail some of his experiences in source checking Nibley materials, which recollections also reveal interesting insights into Nibley the man:

> Once in a while I would get stuck with a recalcitrant footnote that no one else could find and then it was my responsibility to approach Dr. Nibley about its citation information, which I can honestly say he loathed. He would say to me every once in a while that I did not have to footnote everything, but then when he was working on something new he would sometimes stop by Ancient Studies and ask me where a particular citation was located; . . . he wanted to have it right.
>
> On another occasion when Matt Roper and I were sourcing his four *Ensign* articles on the atonement, . . . we came across an essential quote that neither of us could find, so with some fear and trepidation we proceeded to Nibley's little green house. I knocked on the door, and he answered. I asked him where that quote was from, and he said, "Any fool knows where that quote is from!" Taken aback a bit by his abrasiveness and not knowing what else to say, I said, "Well I must not be a fool 'cause I can't find it." That stopped him dead in his tracks, and he grabbed the manuscript and went back into the house in a huff.
>
> We stood there for what seemed like an eternity while we could hear papers rattling and books coming out of his bedside library tossed here and there, and there was a continuous angry mumbling that played in the background like a cello. Finally, he returned to the door more sheepishly than I had ever seen him and said he couldn't find it and would have to get back to us. Matt and I were biting our lips by then. I reminded Nibley that we needed it by the weekend. Before the weekend

32. According to Glen Cooper, personal communication, 8 October 2008, 3, "James Tredway played a key role as the coordinating editor for a number of volumes for several years. The work would never have been finished without his bull-headed dedication to the project and his cantankerous determination."

> was upon us, the manuscript appeared with the new citation inserted. Matt and I rushed to the stacks to check, and sure enough, it was exact. We were flabbergasted, thinking that he would not be able to find such a quote, but he did.[33]

This experience demonstrates a couple of facts: When Nibley was alive, source checkers used every avenue possible to solve a citation problem by themselves, but if they still couldn't resolve the issues, they did approach Nibley, who begrudgingly (because it took him away from whatever he was concentrating on at the moment) directed them to the source. Phyllis Nibley reports that her husband worried a lot about his notes and was quite meticulous in formulating them.[34]

One of the team of source checkers, Janet Carpenter, gives her recollection of the process:

> I can say that I can personally vouch for the accuracy of the footnotes. We went through with a fine-tooth comb and verified everything. I remember as we would wrap up a book, there would be some we couldn't find that then would be dealt with, but the number of problems was minuscule compared to the volume that we did find. Nibley's accuracy was amazing. When we couldn't find something, it was always our fault or a typist's problem in the original manuscript.[35]

Mistakes were not always attributable to Nibley, the typists, or the source checkers. Sometimes editors or publishers seemed to introduce errors in the notes, as well as in the text. Tredway continues:[36]

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33. James V. Tredway, personal communication, 11 August 2008, 6–7.

34. Phyllis Nibley, personal conversation with Shirley Ricks, 11 September 2008.

35. Janet Carpenter (Hovorka), e-mail correspondence, 16 October 2008. She goes on to say: "You have to remember the amazing part of this is that it was pre-internet and pre-database. I remember Tyler Moulton and Andrew Hedges slogging for months through the *Journal of Discourses* for *Brother Brigham Challenges the Saints.* It wasn't very long before you could just type a search on that into a database. But back then you couldn't. And of course when Nibley wrote it, you couldn't do anything of the sort. That is what is so amazing. Brother Nibley amassed and congealed the research. We had a tough time just following it."

36. John Gee relates two amusing stories about the mistakes that editors have made with Nibley's materials. "The first was the editors at the *Ensign* who, in dealing with

> When we got to doing *Tinkling Symbols and Sounding Brass*, it turned out to be very problematic as many of the citations appeared to be wrong. So Matt and I went to Church headquarters and xeroxed every anti-Mormon book that Nibley cited. We brought that mass of manuscripts home and began the daunting task of searching through all those books for every single quote, going page by page. . . . Thanks to Matt's incredible patience and industry, we were able to locate every single quote and in doing so we discovered that all the citations were actually there, but they were jumbled.[37] Apparently the editor had mixed them all up somehow, and when the galleys came I guess Hugh never checked to see if they were kept intact, but rather focused only on the text. I also learned pretty quickly that Hugh did not like editors at all. They were forever making little changes that altered his point without realizing what they had done.[38]

Additionally, in some of Nibley's works, few or no references were given. Source checkers, if they were unable to find the quotations, would sometimes take off the quotation marks and supply a reference that seemed to cover the same territory.[39] These manufactured notes

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Nibley's piece 'A Strange Thing in the Land,' ran across reference to the book of *1 Jeu* and changed it to *1 Jew*. The other one is a typist who accidentally changed a word that she was unfamiliar with. Nibley stated that 'there is no eschatology without protology,' which was changed by the typist to 'there is no eschatology without proctology'; this was amusingly corrupted further as 'there is no scatology without proctology.'" Gee, personal communication, 3 October 2008.

37. According to Matthew Roper, "When I started checking the footnotes for *Mythmakers* and *Sounding Brass* it seemed that about half of the references were incorrect. Upon investigating, however, I found that in most cases the footnotes had either the correct page number with the wrong title or the correct title with the wrong page number. Before the updated volume was published, we had been able to correct all but about 2 percent of the references. This exercise, which I enjoyed very much, suggested to me that Nibley had read through the sources but had been in somewhat of a hurry. Having spent a lot of time reading and rereading and scouring the words of Ann Eliza, I gained a better appreciation for Nibley's wit and humor as well as the patience of Brigham Young."

38. Tredway, personal communication, 11 August 2008, 7–8.

39. Cooper discusses one of the rules the source checkers developed: "If we searched for a note or quotation and could not find it after a reasonable length of time, we agreed

may have been inadequate compared to what Nibley himself might have provided (had he been persuaded to revisit an earlier project).[40]

In the following comment, Tredway mentions the (in)famous Nibley pencil marks in books that source checkers were always delighted to find (that meant they had found the very book Nibley had used, which made it easier to locate and verify the quotations). Nibley often penciled little notations in the margins to emphasize a point (his notes could be pictures, shorthand symbols, or words and phrases in any number of languages)—library patrons would be in big trouble today if they indulged in this habit. Tredway relates:

> As far as the thousands upon thousands of footnotes that we checked, I remember no glaring errors. . . .
>
> . . . I was amazed at the accuracy of his transcriptions as we checked the sources against them. . . . I can't imagine how he read so widely because there were Nibley tracks (notations) in so many books in the Harold B. Lee Library that it seemed no one could have read that much, and that was only one library. When I went to Berkeley to find some of his sources, I found Nibley tracks scattered all over there too. It had been rumored that he started on the first floor and went through every book of interest to him all the way to the top floor of the library, which was many floors (maybe as many as nine).[41] And we got books through Interlibrary Loan from Harvard, Princeton, Stanford, and a bunch of other universities with those same tracks. To think that he typed each quote by hand on a card with that old manual typewriter and indexed them without any computer was mind boggling.[42]

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to give up and simply remove the quotation marks and the footnote. But in my experience this was rare. . . . With a bit of sleuthing, the correct reference could be found." Cooper, personal communication, 8 October 2008, 2, 1.

40. Thanks to James Tredway for reminding me of this issue.

41. See Hugh Nibley's description of this phenomenon in "An Intellectual Autobiography," in *Eloquent Witness: Nibley on Himself, Others, and the Temple* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 2008), 12.

42. Tredway, personal communication, 11 August 2008, 8–9.

Here we have one clue why some of Nibley's citations may have been inaccurate—he read extremely widely and took notes on three-by-five-inch index cards without the benefit of modern computers or copy machines. Anyone making that volume of notes by hand is bound to make some mistakes. Tyler Moulton, one of the Collected Workers, reports on his experience in source checking Nibley footnotes:

> Having spent hundreds of hours poring over thousands of Nibley's footnotes, I will agree that Nibley was at times sloppy. His legendary methodology of keeping his research notes on 3 x 5 cards in shoeboxes did not always lend itself to absolute accuracy—either in context or reference. In *Brother Brigham Challenges the Saints*, for example, Nibley made frequent use of the *Journal of Discourses*, among other sources. Andy Hedges and I were tasked with tracking down as many of the remaining "mystery footnotes" from this volume as we could. Our methodology was to work through every variation of the given footnote numbers until we stumbled upon the source, and in almost every instance we eventually found the correct combination. Far from being an example of fabricating sources, the frequent transposition of numbers caused me to occasionally joke about Nibley's apparent dyslexia.[43]

Tredway relates that when he was having difficulty locating some of the sources for "Paths That Stray,"[44] he went in desperation to Nibley's house, where he was taken upstairs and shown a huge cardboard box filled with scraps of articles. He found "in that box every single quote and every single citation for the entire manuscript. Not a single one of them was misquoted, out of context, or inappropriately cited."[45]

I will include here one more reminiscence from Tredway, which reveals that what may seem at first to be inaccurate actually turns out to be correct:

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43. Tyler Moulton, personal communication, 25 September 2008, 1. The difficulty in locating these sources would have been circumvented with current Internet technology.

44. Hugh Nibley, "Paths That Stray: Some Notes on Sophic and Mantic," in *The Ancient State: The Rulers and the Ruled* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 380–478.

45. Tredway, personal communication, 11 August 2008, 9–10.

> A group of us researchers used to try to find something that Hugh was off base on. It was kind of a game we played to make the time pass. On one occasion we found something—I think it was in the Pearl of Great Price articles, a Masonic symbol as I recall—and we were sure Hugh had got his description all wrong. We set out to find everything we could on that topic. After much work, to our surprise and chagrin it turned out he was right on target and we were dead wrong. And this happened over and over, and after some time it became the rule not to prejudge Nibley before you had done your homework because he turned over every rock on the stream bed before he put pen to paper.[46]

John Gee relates a similar experience in discovering Nibley's uncanny accuracy:

> Nibley, in a throwaway line, compared an Egyptian text with a passage in the Talmud about alabaster.[47] When I checked the given source, I thought that although the source said what Nibley said it said, that Nibley was guilty of free association. Doing research for a graduate seminar that focused on the same passage in the Talmud, I discovered that there was actually a rather bizarre connection between the two passages, which I discuss in my article "The Keeper of the Gate."[48]

Charge of Fabricated Notes

Those of us who have spent hours tracking down Nibley sources have become firmly convinced that nothing was made up or fabricated. Even if we were ultimately unable to find a quotation, we always knew it existed somewhere. Sometimes we serendipitously ran across

46. Tredway, personal communication, 11 August 2008, 10.

47. Hugh Nibley, *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 2005), 201.

48. Gee, personal communication, 3 October 2008; see John Gee, "The Keeper of the Gate," in *The Temple in Time and Eternity*, ed. Donald W. Parry and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 235.

something that solved a different problem than the one we were researching. Gee recalls:

> I think all the source checkers have stories like this. Some of the problems were not Nibley's fault. I remember discovering a recalcitrant source that was cited dozens of times but which we could not find in the library (Urk. VI). I was looking for another book in the stacks when a book caught my eye. Pulling it out and looking at it, I discovered that it was the long-lost source. The library had rebound the book and mislabeled it on the cover and the spine. Nibley had dutifully written the correct bibliography in pencil inside the cover.
>
> Another time, we looked everywhere for weeks for Georgius Cedrenus and Georgius Syncellus without any luck. On a whim, we looked in the card catalog under "George" and found that the library had two copies of both authors within ten feet of where we were working.[49]

No, Nibley did not fabricate his notes! According to Welch,

> Many people also continued to parrot mindlessly the unfounded criticism that Nibley's footnotes were all made up or were not reliable. Our source checkers, quite to the contrary, found Nibley's sources were, for the most part, very insightfully interpreted and accurately reflected. Many of the footnotes were cryptic and incomplete and so a lot of work was required to make them clear, but to an informed, intelligent reader even the early citations should have been comprehensible and seen as credible.[50]

Gee reaffirmed this claim in an e-mail correspondence to Huggins:

> I still stand by [my] two statements [made earlier] . . . : "I have never seen any case where Hugh Nibley ever fabricated or made up a source. After looking up thousands of citations,

49. Gee, personal communication, 3 October 2008.
50. Welch, e-mail correspondence, 11 August 2008.

> I have seen him make just about every mistake I think one could make, but I have never seen him make up anything." "In no case could I determine that any of the errors in the footnotes were intentional or that any of the footnotes were fabrications."[51]

Moulton asserts that when he was working on the article "Science Fiction and the Gospel," several source checkers had been unable to locate Nibley's sources (after all, this was given as a talk and probably didn't have fleshed-out footnotes).

> For days I searched in vain for any evidence of the referenced authors or titles. (This was in the dark era before the Internet.) In a couple of instances I had found stories resembling Nibley's descriptions, but neither author nor title matched. Not knowing what else to do, I substituted the references I discovered for those given by Nibley. But in most cases I could find nothing. I was about ready to give up and turn the manuscript back in when, late one night while perusing the stacks in the HBLL, I randomly stumbled upon an anthology of science fiction pieces bearing Nibley's telltale shorthand scratchings in the margins. A quick perusal confirmed that many of the authors and titles I had been searching for were indeed there, and similar anthologies (with similar chicken scratches) uncovered the rest. (I discovered that the stories I had encountered previously were indeed the stories Nibley had referenced, but as was common at the time, they had been republished in different places under different pseudonyms and titles.)[52]

Moulton makes a good point that "some of the blame for inadequate or misleading references must fall to us—the compilers, editors, and source checkers—since it was well known at the time that in a great

51. John Gee, e-mail correspondence to Ronald Huggins, 12 July 2006, referring to statements of John Gee, e-mail correspondence to Boyd Petersen, 14 March 2005 and 13 January 2005 (p. 20).

52. Moulton, personal communication, 25 September 2008, 1–2.

many cases Nibley agreed only grudgingly and after serious protestation to the publication of much of this work"—in other words, he hadn't written it with publication in mind. Perhaps "what we prepared for general scholarly consumption was, in more than a few instances, originally intended only as his latest musings for informal gatherings. Our insistence on making as much as possible of Nibley's work available has perhaps brought on the unintended consequence of weakening the perception of his scholarship."[53]

For example, Nibley never intended for the book *Approaching Zion* to be published.[54] Tredway gathered up the various articles and proposed it as a book to Stephen Ricks, who subsequently sold John Welch on the idea. Nibley was not fond of that book when it came out because it was a collection of talks and not as scholarly as some of his writing—he apparently told his Book of Mormon students not to buy it. However, it subsequently became a bestseller. A book that he never wanted published has reportedly changed the lives of countless individuals, while no one has made that claim about his scholarly work in the *Ancient State*.

In one recent volume of the Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, we were faced with the situation of adapting Nibley's class notes from the fifties into a book form. We published *Apostles and Bishops in Early Christianity* in 2005 with over seventy notes saying tersely, "Source unidentified." However, Douglas F. Salmon, working on his own initiative, has located over 60 percent of those sources.[55] To reiterate, Nibley does not fake his sources.

This brings me back to the question posed on the FAIR Web site: "I've heard that Hugh Nibley really just faked or distorted most of his footnotes. Is there any truth to this?" The summary response given here says: "There is no question but that Hugh Nibley was an absolutely brilliant scholar. He was also very creative and sometimes

53. Moulton, personal communication, 25 September 2008, 2. Cooper, personal communication, 8 October 2008, 2, corroborates this view: "I heard Hugh many times complain that FARMS had published something of his that embarrassed him because it represented an earlier perspective that he had surpassed in his scholarly growth."

54. Hugh Nibley, *Approaching Zion* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1989).

55. Douglas F. Salmon, letters to John W. Welch, 22 March 2005 and 15 January 2008.

overaggressive in his use of sources, and sometimes he was wrong about things, as are all scholars and indeed all human beings. But the notion that he just made up his footnotes is simply ridiculous."[56] The full response includes quotations from a source checker (anonymous), Boyd J. Petersen (Nibley's son-in-law and biographer), Kent P. Jackson (who offered a less-than-positive critique of volume 1 of the Collected Works), and John Gee (who, along with Stephen Ricks, "has probably checked as many or more of Nibley's footnotes than anyone alive"). Gee's conclusion is that "the vast majority of his footnotes are correct and that only a few are questioned; even fewer would be seen as questionable. . . . Those of us checking footnotes spent more of our time dealing with problems (a correct footnote takes only a minute or so to check, while fixing a problem may take hours), and that makes us inclined to vastly overestimate the number of problems."[57]

Charge of Misrepresentation

The grievance that Nibley misrepresented his sources or took things out of context must be examined.[58] Because of Nibley's wide

56. See "Hugh Nibley/Footnotes," especially all the footnotes that lead to other sources.

57. See John Gee, "Hugh Nibley/Footnotes," personal communication to FAIR wiki editors, 10 August 2007. Louis Midgley addresses this topic in this issue of the *FARMS Review*, p. 296, in his review of *Eloquent Witness*, by Nibley. "There is also a tall tale being circulated that has become a favorite of one sectarian anti-Mormon zealot. His argument is that Nibley both roundly distorted the sources he cited and faked his footnotes. . . . I did the source and quotation checking on two of his more complicated essays ["Beyond Politics" and "Treasures in the Heavens"], and I was eventually able to track everything down. The many problems I had finding the sources he cited, I discovered, were the result of my own ignorance. And whatever tiny mistakes I found were either transpositions of page numbers or the obvious result of his having relied on his shorthand notes. This is not, of course, to say that I would put exactly the same spin on all the passages he cited or quoted. But my mastery of the languages and literature he consulted and cited is at best rudimentary. Of course, Nibley got some things wrong. And, of course, subsequent LDS scholarship has not always supported some of his hunches. That is to be expected. It happens to everyone who ventures away from routine, safe paths. It is time that critics cease attacking the man and deal, instead, with relevant substantive issues. When some of Nibley's critics have tried to do this, they have floundered at times because they lack his command of the relevant languages and cannot match the scope of his learning."

58. Nibley seems to be in good company here. Regarding his translation of the Bible into German, Martin Luther was "charged by the enemies of truth that the text has been modified and even falsified in many places." In response, Luther wrote an open letter on

background reading, I believe that he grasped the big picture and could interpret things in ways that unsettled some of his readers who may have been unaware of the context in which he wrote. Again, Tredway renders an opinion:

> It seems a bit ironic to me that they would accuse Nibley of taking things out of context when in many cases such a context did not even exist when he wrote them. Conversely, having said that, I am also not so sure that those so-called scraps of ideas that seem to be found all over the world are in fact not related. I think it remains to be seen just how related they turn out to be. We are constantly finding new connections that we did not know existed yesterday and if Nibley had any gift at all it was an uncanny ability to see connections or trends where most saw nothing but chaos.[59]

Don Norton, who has edited much of Nibley's writings, questions whether Huggins recognizes a proportion between what Nibley got wrong versus what he got right:

> Huggins notes what he thinks are liberties with sources, but fails to acknowledge where and how overwhelmingly often Nibley was right. He glibly sets up some sweeping (and very questionable) allegations, offers a few examples, and then alleges these are but a drop in the bucket to Nibley's offenses. Few scholars could survive such shabby treatment, certainly not Huggins himself.[60]

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translation in which he makes such statements as "If I, Dr. Luther, had expected that all the papists together were capable of translating even one chapter of Scripture correctly and well into German, I would have gathered up enough humility to ask for their aid and assistance. . . . However, because I knew . . . that not one of them knows how to translate or speak German, I spared them and myself the trouble. . . . I know quite well how much skill, hard work, sense and brains are needed for a good translation." Martin Luther, "Ein Sendbrief D. M. Luthers. Von Dolmetschen und Fürbit der Heiligenn," in *Dr. Martin Luthers Werke* (Weimar: Böhlhaus, 1909), 30.2.632–46, available online at www.bible-researcher.com/luther01.html (accessed 7 October 2008).

59. Tredway, personal communication, 11 August 2008, 10–11.

60. Don Norton, personal communication, 13 August 2008, 2. It might be informative to check the footnotes to one of Huggins's own articles, perhaps even the one under

Michael Rhodes, who is currently preparing Nibley's *One Eternal Round* manuscript for publication, echoes Norton's thoughts: "My experience in checking on thousands of Nibley's footnotes is that more than 90% of the time he is completely accurate. In the remaining cases, for the most part, there is some trivial discrepancy. In rare cases, he does get it wrong. He was, after all, human like the rest of us and could make mistakes. What is impressive is that his mistakes are so few."[61]

Glen Cooper, one of the Collected Workers, describes his experience in checking Nibley's notes:

> I have had extensive experience checking Nibley's footnote references in the Graeco-Roman classics and church fathers. . . .
>
> . . . I never found anything that indicated less than integrity on Hugh's part in reporting others' work, or in attributing sources. In fact, I was always impressed by his sincerity in his use of sources, as well as the strength and conviction of his testimony of the gospel and church. . . . If he had a fault as a scholar, perhaps it was haste and impatience. He was the genius with the vision; the work of other scholars had to be accounted for—that is the scholar's responsibility after all.[62]

(Mis)translations

Huggins contends that Nibley manipulates translations to his own needs, adding things that don't exist in the Greek[63] or creating translations that differ from those of other experts. In his article, Huggins focuses on translations of early Christian documents, which approach makes sense, since that is his field of expertise.[64] Nibley's reading and

review.

61. Michael Rhodes, e-mail correspondence, 8 August 2008.

62. Cooper, personal communication, 8 October 2008, 1. (As an undergraduate, Cooper earned national awards in Greek translation and Latin composition.)

63. On adding a word in German that wasn't in the original, Luther explains that "it conveys the sense of the text—if the translation is to be clear and vigorous, it belongs there." Luther, "Ein Sendbrief D. M. Luthers."

64. Even so it is not apparent that Huggins's readings of the primary sources in the original language is as extensive as Nibley's. Huggins criticizes an unusual translation

writings, however, extend over a much wider range than this narrow area. Evangelical scholars Carl Mosser and Paul Owen concede that

> whatever one may think about Nibley's conclusions, the breadth of learning displayed in these lectures [that ultimately appeared in *The World and the Prophets, CWHN* 3] is intimidating. In them he discusses hundreds of texts from Papias, Clement, Ignatius, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Athanasius, Augustine, and Chrysostom (among others). In classic Nibley style, all references are personally translated from Greek and Latin originals; rarely are translations listed for modern German, French, or Italian works.[65]

Huggins, in developing his case against Nibley's interpretations, always seems to cite the translations of others in comparison to Nibley's and never seems confident enough to translate the primary sources himself.[66] In defending himself and his translation of the Bible, Martin Luther puts things in perspective:

> Yet why should I be concerned about their ranting and raving? I will not stop them from translating as they want. But I too shall translate, not as they please but as I please. And whoever does not like it can just ignore it and keep his

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of a Greek phrase by Gee because he was using a different sense of the word than other commentators or than what one might find in a New Testament Greek dictionary (p. 11 n. 14). Huggins does not translate the phrase independently. He seems to ignore the fact that Gee knew it was an unusual translation and explained his reasoning. Is not scholarship presenting one's point of view and then defending it?

65. See Carl Mosser and Paul Owen, "Mormon Scholarship, Apologetics, and Evangelical Neglect: Losing the Battle and Not Knowing It?" *Trinity Journal*, n.s., 19/2 (1998): 196. My thanks to Tredway for reminding me of this source.

66. I am unaware of the languages Huggins may have studied or of what level of competence he may have achieved in them (he does mention having taught Latin in private Christian schools), but he seems unwilling (or unable) to translate these passages for himself (see note 58 above). I would think that demonstrating a personal knowledge of the languages would be essential in making his arguments. Why did Huggins select the translations he did? "Do they better explain the meaning or experiences of the people of that time when compared to Nibley's translation? Translation is a fluid conversion of one culture to another and is done with many factors in mind." James V. Tredway, e-mail correspondence, 24 September 2008.

> criticism to himself, for I will neither look at nor listen to it. They do not have to answer for my translation or bear any responsibility for it.[67]

So when Huggins turns to a consensus of experts, does that establish a claim, or is it possible that "Nibley actually got it right in contradiction to all the experts"?[68] Moulton relates an experience in checking one of Nibley's translations:

> I will say that in the one instance in which I had the responsibility to check a translation in a language in which I had personal expertise (Spanish)—a language, moreover, that Nibley had little experience with—I was surprised by his translation. I began by consulting the original and making my own translation, then compared what I had come up with against Nibley's. They were wildly different. But as I went back through it carefully, it quickly became apparent that Nibley's understanding of Spanish nuance (based, I assume, on his command of Latin) far exceeded my own, and his translation, while unconventional, was far superior to my own, capturing far more accurately both the tone and the meaning of the original. From my perspective, Nibley's skills in translation were nothing short of prodigious.[69]

In addition to the possibility that Nibley was a genius with languages, let's examine some additional potential reasons Nibley's translations may differ from those of others.

- Nibley is using a more ancient and therefore more accurate text to translate from.

67. Luther, "Ein Sendbrief D. M. Luthers." He continues: "I have learned by experience what an art and what a task translating is, so I will not tolerate some papal donkey or mule acting as my judge or critic. They have not tried it. If anyone does not like my translations, he can ignore it. . . . If it needs to be criticized, I will do it myself. If I do not do it, then let them leave my translations in peace. Each of them can do a translation for himself that suits him—what do I care?" I have a feeling Luther and Nibley would get along well together.

68. Moulton, personal communication, 25 September 2008, 3.

69. Moulton, personal communication, 25 September 2008, 3.

- Nibley's wide reading and understanding of the entire milieu gives him a better understanding of how the passage should be translated, but this is not common knowledge (broader hermeneutics).
- Nibley had a better grasp of the English language than other translators did.[70]
- Nibley did not feel bound by some of the rules that some translators use that often result in stilted translations.
- Nibley was careless in where he put quotation marks on his note cards.
- Nibley was not competent in Greek or Hebrew (or any of the other languages he translated).[71]

Some of these ideas are more plausible than others. I am willing to grant all but the last option, but given that Nibley was able to quote passages at length (from memory) in the original language and then translate on the fly, one becomes convinced that he was indeed very competent in these languages and was brilliant in decoding what the author meant. Kristian Heal, a Syriac expert, comments on Nibley's unique translation of the first line of the *Hymn of the Pearl* as "In my first primeval childhood."[72]

> The first line of the *Hymn of the Pearl/the Soul* is rendered by the two earliest translators, William Wright (1871) and A. A. Bevan (1897), as "When I was a little child." This is an accurate translation of the Syriac, though "young child" may be better since the Syriac seems to suggest the innocence and simplicity of the child.
>
> Nibley's rendering is obviously highly evocative for Latter-day Saints[73] and casts the hymn squarely as an allegory of pre-mortal and mortal life. I would characterize it as an elegant,

70. "Hugh was a great stylist in English; his command of the language and skill at argument will long remain vibrant and powerful even after the content of his scholarship may have faded, or at worst, become antiquated." Cooper, personal communication, 8 October 2008, 2–3.

71. Suggestions from James V. Tredway, e-mail correspondence, 20 August 2008, and Gee, personal communication, 3 October 2008.

72. Nibley, *Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri*, 488.

73. See "O My Father," *Hymns*, no. 292, verse 1.

> poetic, but thoroughly tendentious translation that seeks to reinforce his interpretation of the poem as a whole. I have no doubt that Nibley understood the text. To my mind, it would have been desirable to indicate the more literal rendering in a footnote.[74]

Obviously, Nibley's style of translation in not necessarily literal.[75] Here is his own description of the process of translation:

> You translate with the book closed. You decide exactly what the original writer had in mind. Unless you know, don't leave his text; stay with him until you decide you know what he means. Then close the book—never translate with it open—and put down in your *own* words what you think the author had in mind, what you have gotten from the text. No two people are going to get the same thing.[76]

In this same article, he also says that "the translation is a commentary—what the translator thinks the writer had in mind." He explains that "every word is a password. Not only is the text loaded, every word is loaded, and every translation is an interpretation. It is a paradox."[77] So whatever the explanation for the differences in translation between Nibley and the commentators, did his "mistranslations" (as described and identified by Huggins) send Nibley's arguments and conclusions so far afield that they lost all validity? How has his work stood the test of time? Norton explores Nibley's translations further:

> Nibley did have two major and often unappreciated things going for him. First, he simply knew so much! Thus, in the interest of space, he often translated or cited sources in a context rarely available to the mostly pedestrian (and usually far *more* "prejudiced") scholarly community. For

74. Kristian Heal, e-mail correspondence, 7 October 2008.

75. Cooper, personal communication, 8 October 2008, 1, admits that "occasionally he would read a source in an idiosyncratic way, but that's the scholar's prerogative."

76. Hugh Nibley, "Translation," notes from a presentation, 11 February 1975, Salt Lake City, Utah, 3.4. In this particular passage, he was referring to translating poetry.

77. Nibley, "Translation," 3.3–4.

> example, when he cited an early church father, it was in the context of his having read *all* the early church fathers, in their original languages. . . . He also remained mute on countless views and doctrines—you get only a hint here and there of all he knew. His knowledge was largely private, the result of his passion to satisfy his own personal curiosity, as he used to often say.
>
> Second, he had a reliable frame of reference: the restored gospel and access to the Spirit.[78]

I find Norton's last suggestion very intriguing. Richard Lloyd Anderson, in an examination of the Olivet Prophecy and Joseph Smith's translation of Matthew 24 in the Pearl of Great Price, concluded that Joseph Smith did not work with any original language to prepare his "translation." "In fact, Greek variant readings simply do not exist for most changes made, whether here or elsewhere in the Inspired Version. Such evidence proves that Joseph Smith worked on the level of meaning and doctrinal harmonization, not narrow textual precision. . . . This suggests that the Prophet used his basic document . . . as a point of departure instead of a translation guide. . . . One may label this as 'translation' only in the broadest sense."[79] Without going so far as to grant prophethood to Nibley, it does not seem impossible or implausible that he could have relied on the Spirit to aid in his "translation" efforts. Luther, referring to his own translation of the Bible into the language of the people, proclaimed: "Ah, translating is not everyone's skill as some mad saints imagine. It requires a right, devout, honest, sincere, God-fearing, Christian, trained, educated, and experienced heart"—in other words, a person cognizant of and sensitive to the Spirit (in fact, he holds "that no false Christian or sectarian spirit can be a good translator").[80]

78. Norton, personal communication, 13 August 2008, 2.

79. Richard Lloyd Anderson, "Joseph Smith's Insights into the Olivet Prophecy: Joseph Smith 1 and Matthew 24," in *Pearl of Great Price Symposium: A Centennial Presentation* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 1976), 50; my thanks to Tredway for suggesting this source and this idea.

80. Luther, "Ein Sendbrief D. M. Luthers."

As I conclude my thoughts on the value and veracity of Nibley's footnotes, I wish to quote Norton once more, who reminds us of Nibley's opinions of his own writing:

> I've never done intensive comparison of what Nibley cited from sources and what the sources actually said. I guess I've just had implicit faith that Nibley was being as responsible as humanly possible. I am aware that he often quoted from memory (especially the scriptures) and was not always precise in writing down the exact wording and page numbers of sources, though virtually always the right meaning. Over the years, I've talked to many who *have* done source checking, and they say they have rarely found Nibley taking any liberty with a source. Quite the contrary. Nibley would be the first to admit to human error on his part, but his breadth of learning and sheer genius make such shortcomings seem insignificant. I don't think his critics have much of an idea of the competence he brought to his work—but his scholarly peers were certainly overwhelmed by his knowledge and abilities.[81]

Scholars have recognized that Nibley was unique in his preparation and his knowledge. Mosser and Owen call him the "father of Mormon scholarly apologetics," as they describe his "seemingly endless stream of books and articles covering a vast array of subject matter. Whether writing on Patristics, the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Apocrypha, the culture of the Ancient Near East, or Mormonism, he demonstrates an impressive command of the original languages, primary texts, and secondary literature."[82] They go on to recognize that "the few evangelicals who are aware of Hugh Nibley often dismiss him as a fraud or pseudo-scholar"; Mosser and Owen recommend that those who would dismiss his writings should pay heed to Truman Madsen's warning: "Ill wishing critics have suspected over the years that Nibley is wrenching his sources, hiding behind his footnotes, and reading into antique languages what no responsible scholar would ever read

81. Norton, personal communication, 13 August 2008, 2.
82. Mosser and Owen, "Mormon Scholarship," 183.

out. Unfortunately, few have the tools to do the checking."[83] Mosser and Owen continue in the same vein:

> No doubt there are flaws in Nibley's work, but most countercultists do not have the tools to uncover them. Few have tried. . . . Whatever flaws may exist in his methodology, Nibley is a scholar of high caliber. Many of his more important essays first appeared in academic journals. . . . Nibley has also received praise from non-LDS scholars such as Jacob Neusner, James Charlesworth, Cyrus Gordon, Raphael Patai, and Jacob Milgrom.[84] The former dean of the Harvard Divinity School, George MacRae, once lamented while hearing him lecture, "It is obscene for a man to know that much!"[85]

Nibley on His Own Writings and Publication in General

Last, but not least, I quote some gems, in chronological order, from the grand master himself:

> I refuse to be held responsible for anything I wrote more than three years ago. For heaven's sake, I hope we are moving forward here. After all, the implication that one mistake and it is all over with—how flattering to think in forty years I have not made one slip and I am still in business! I would say about four-fifths of everything I put down has changed, of course. That is the whole idea; this is an ongoing process.[86]

83. Mosser and Owen, "Mormon Scholarship," 183, quoting Truman G. Madsen, foreword to *Nibley on the Timely and the Timeless: Classic Essays of Hugh W. Nibley* (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1978), xiv.

84. See the contributions by these men in volume 1 of the Festschrift published in Nibley's honor, *By Study and Also by Faith*, as well as a second essay by Neusner in volume 2.

85. Mosser and Owen, "Mormon Scholarship," 183–84, quoting from Philip L. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible: The Place of the Latter-day Saints in American Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 147 n. 105. This note also describes "the prolific Hugh Nibley, whose genius is unquestioned . . . but whose methods remain controversial."

86. Hugh Nibley, "The Facsimiles of the Book of Abraham: A Response," *Sunstone*, December 1979, 49; to appear in volume 18 of the Collected Works, *An Approach to the Book of Abraham*.

It may seem churlish to cite sources to which the reader has no access, but the purpose of such is to silence critics who are eager to call everything into question, and rightly so. If they want to run the stuff down they are cordially invited to do so—that is part of the game.[87]

What I am working on now is far more interesting than what has gone before. And so I tend to let all the rest of it go. What is worth saving will probably be saved, but that can't be very much, and in this world it is vain to pin one's hopes on the survival of anything for long. What belongs to the eternities will not be lost; the rest does not interest me very much.[88]

Going back over things I wrote years ago, in taking an inventory of the garage, I find that some of it is not so bad, and that time has been very kind to some of my more ambitious articles. Wherefore, I am now aspiring to produce one thing which at least will not be very, very bad. For this, I look to the future, and as far as I am concerned, the past stuff must by its very nature be inferior, since it came forth in my perpetual *jāhiliyyah* ("time of ignorance").[89]

I am ashamed to admit how ignorant I was when I got two doctorate degrees—one, you might know, is honorary—but if you are alert in the ways of scholarship you should know that people are to be judged only by what they produce, and that is to be judged *not* by the credentials of the author but by your own estimate of what he says. My efforts are heavily loaded with footnotes to take the heat off me and shunt the reader to the sources he should consult. For in the field of ancient history I regret to say I was not privileged to be present at any of the events recorded—that is why I must cravenly refer the reader to others.[90]

87. Hugh Nibley, letter to Susie Timko, Provo, Utah, 19 October 1979.
88. Hugh Nibley, letter to David H. Mulholland, Anaheim, California, 26 June 1981.
89. Hugh Nibley, letter to Pam Lane, Simi Valley, California, 22 June 1982.
90. Hugh Nibley, letter to David L. Parkos, Parker, Colorado, 2 December 1983.

> My long delay in answering you is due to the months of soul-searching to determine, if I could, why on earth anybody would want to hear from me. I am a crashing bore, and that is why I plaster everything I write so heavily with footnotes, turning the conversation over to more interesting people.[91]

At one juncture in his paper, Huggins mentions that although "his literary output was enormous, Hugh Nibley seldom published in scholarly journals outside Utah, and even less in ones dedicated to the study of ancient Judaism, Christianity, and the Bible."[92] He conjectures that this may partially be a result of Nibley's "propensity for misquotation" (p. 16). Fortunately, on Nibley's choice of where to publish we can turn to his own explanation:

> But to be taken seriously one must publish, and I soon found that publishing in the journals is as easy and mechanical as getting grades: I sent out articles to a wide variety of prestigious journals, and they were all printed. So I lost interest. What those people were after is not what I was after. Above all, I could see no point to going on through the years marshalling an ever-lengthening array of titles to stand at attention some day at the foot of an obituary. That is what they were all working for, and they were welcome to it. But there

91. Hugh Nibley, letter to Irene Horsley, Kearns, Utah, 22 May 1985.

92. I'm not sure what point Huggins is trying to make here—a quick glance at "Hugh Winder Nibley: Bibliography and Register," comp. Louis Midgley, in *By Study and Also by Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1990), 1:xv–lxxxvii, reveals that Nibley published in at least the following periodicals: *American Political Science Review*, *Christianity Today*, *Church History*, *Classical Journal*, *Concilium: An International Review of Theology*, *Historian*, *Jewish Quarterly Review*, *Revue de Qumran*, *Vigiliae Christianae*, *and Western Political Quarterly*, as well as in *Encyclopedia Judaica*. He was offered the distinguished position of departmental editor for the encyclopedia for sections dealing with Christian Latin biblical exegesis (it sounds to me like they had a pretty high opinion of Nibley's linguistic talents), but he regretfully declined when he couldn't clear his busy schedule. See Boyd J. Petersen, *Hugh Nibley: A Consecrated Life* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2002), 299–300. I see listed on Huggins's own bibliography very few publications in academic journals; the rest of his writing seems to concentrate on criticizing the faith and teachings of the Latter-day Saints. Is that how someone with a research degree (ThD) advances from assistant to associate professorship?

> were hints I could not ignore and answers I must seek for my own peace of mind.[93]

Ironically, the first rejection of a piece for publication came from the church-published periodical *The Instructor*. Nibley must have been most astonished that the editor, Loren F. Wheelwright, had the audacity to reject a solicited article on "Archaeology and Our Religion" for a series entitled "I Believe."[94] Since Nibley believed that "archaeological evidences were a particularly shaky form of proof," he unexpectedly "delineated the overall weaknesses of archaeology as a science."[95] Upon receiving the rejection, Nibley wrote a rather scathing five-page response in which he said that he, of course, was "beyond all doubt the world's foremost authority" on what he believed.[96]

This last, and quite lengthy, quotation is Nibley's description of what is essential in writing and publishing in graduate school. Here he proposes the ideal circumstances of preparing a paper for publication.

> Question: You have said that a paper must be first of all authentic. What do you mean by that?
>
> Answer: Two things—but they are really the same: it must be accurate, and it must be complete. Without the highest standards of accuracy, even the most ingenious and learned study may be not only useless—since the work will have to be done all over again—but actually pernicious, since it will lead the unwary astray.

93. Nibley, "An Intellectual Autobiography," 15–16.

94. "This, in fact, is the *first* article I have ever had rejected, which makes it most interesting—especially since the rejection is by an LDS publication which requested it in the first place!" Hugh Nibley, letter to Loren F. Wheelwright, 16 September 1965. Interestingly, during his years of being in charge of music in the Salt Lake City School District, Wheelwright was partially responsible for encouraging Phyllis Nibley to take up the cello in the sixth grade (although he rightly concluded that Louis Midgley had no future with the violin).

95. Petersen, *Hugh Nibley*, 300–301. This article was eventually published in Hugh Nibley, *Old Testament and Related Studies* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1986), 21–36.

96. Nibley, letter to Wheelwright, 16 September 1965.

Question: But isn't perfect accuracy impossible?

Answer: Yes, slips can be detected in the most careful work, but they are not characteristic of such work—they are recognizably slips. It is when inaccuracy is due to lack of familiarity with one's subject, usually when one has bitten off more than one can chew, sliding over into related areas with which one has only limited acquaintance, that inaccuracy becomes disastrous. Accuracy is actually a much rarer quality than we think. It requires patient and meticulous covering of *all* the ground. That is the sort of drudgery with which the "grand old man" or the "authority" in his field is liable to have diminishing patience with over the years, and with which the young student eager for success and recognition may have no patience at all. The temptation to cheat is very great—who is going to go to all the trouble of looking up one's footnotes? Not even the reviewers. Inaccurate documentation may go undiscovered for years. Being accurate requires doing a thoroughly thorough job. That is why we say that accuracy and completeness are really the same thing in research.

Question: If there is no such thing as perfect accuracy, how complete is complete?

Answer: More complete than you think: where any information at all is lacking, no conclusions can ever be trusted; how often has just one bit of evidence changed the whole picture? No stone can be left unturned; since there is no way of knowing what an unexamined source might contain, to leave any source unexamined is to ignore material that may, and often does, refute one's entire thesis.

Question: Do you mean that an ordinary student must examine *every* piece of evidence on a subject?

Answer: Yes. Not to use all available evidence is to defeat the whole purpose of research, which is to add to the fund of existing knowledge. How can you add to it if you don't know what is already there and what is missing? No future progress is possible where past progress is ignored. What is the advan-

tage of centuries of writing and research that others have put into my subject if I intend to consider only ten percent of it? By what right do I presume to ask others to give my work the respectful attention which I deny to theirs? We cannot honestly add a word to historical writing until we know what needs to be added.

Question: Do you mean that an ordinary student must examine every source in every library in the world before he considers his work done?

Answer: Exactly. I grant you it isn't easy (there is no such thing as an ordinary student, by the way); in the past, it has been all but impossible, and for that reason real scholars were few and far between. But today the whole structure of university research activity is based on the assumption that complete research is possible. . . .

Question: Should ten, twenty, or thirty references be required for a term paper?

Answer: I have heard that question before at the BYU and hardly believed my ears. On the old Library Committee we used to discuss by the hour how many titles would be necessary for the library of a college with five thousand, ten thousand, or fifteen thousand students. It would make as much sense to ask how many volumes of an encyclopedia are needed by a small school, a middle-sized school, or a large school, or how many ingredients should go into a one-pound, a two-pound, or a three-pound pudding or cake. The answer is always the same: no matter how *much* of a thing you want to make, you must always put into it *all* the ingredients its nature requires. For a given paper one must have *all* the references necessary for an honest presentation—whether that means two or two hundred is entirely beside the point. . . .

Question: Isn't it both exhausting and discouraging to try to buck the fierce competition in the scholarly journals?

Answer: There is no competition! The press is large and hungry—overexpanded, in fact, and the constant complaint of

> editors is that they almost never get anything that is informed, original, and significant. The editors are pathetically eager to welcome any good material from any source.[97]

Based on Nibley's recommendations, it is likely that few publications meet these rigorous standards. Nibley was one of the few scholars who could come close to claiming that he had covered "*all* the ground." His incessant and insatiable drive to read and to learn allowed him to acknowledge that some of what he wrote should be rejected, changed, or built upon. He was always ready to confess shortcomings, but he never lost the thrill of gaining and sharing new insights. I have always pictured him in the hereafter meeting with Abraham or some other prophet or scholar in earnest conversation: "Tell me how things really were when you were on the earth," "Oh, so that's what really happened," or "That principle now makes perfect sense." He would then promptly debunk, in typical fashion, all he had written in mortality. I submit, however, that inasmuch as his writings continue to influence people for good he has not written in vain and that any existing errors in his corpus do not negate the overall good he has done and continues to do. Nibley, I propose, has built "upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God." He realized, along with Helaman, "that ye must build your foundation; that when the devil shall send forth his mighty winds, yea, his shafts in the whirlwind, yea, when all his hail and his mighty storm shall beat upon you, it shall have no power over you to drag you down to the gulf of misery and endless wo, because of the rock upon which ye are built, which is a sure foundation, a foundation whereon if men build they cannot fall" (Helaman 5:12).[98]

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97. Hugh Nibley, "Writing and Publication in Graduate School," 5–6, 10, 11; this article is slated to appear in a future volume of the Collected Works.

98. Tom Caldwell, who was instrumental in rescuing some of Nibley's works from the "underground" and who made services and copy equipment available for the source-checking project, describes Nibley's Sunday School classes: "He always gave us fresh perspective on the scriptures, and he bore testimony of the gospel as one who was a true witness. This was testimony based on experience, not just on theory and book learning. We learned that by carefully reading the scriptures we could find the answers to any questions they brought up (usually within the next couple of verses). Nibley paid attention to the smallest of details, especially when it came to the scriptures. We weren't just fed from the scriptures—in his classes, we were served a feast fit for the greatest of kings." Nibley's

Appendix: Introductions to Volumes in the Collected Works of Hugh Nibley

As John Gee informed Huggins, "The question is whether the source cited says what the author citing it says that it says. This procedure has been described in several editorial introductions to works in the Collected Works of Hugh Nibley."[99] I have collated here several statements drawn from those introductions, as well as an additional statement made in a review by Todd Compton, that shed light on Nibley's footnotes.

> The first step in this process of settling the territory mapped out by Nibley is the extremely welcome and valuable *Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*. . . . Here, all of Nibley's footnotes have been checked for accuracy and relevancy—so simple errors such as wrong page numbers, confusing or incorrect bibliographical information, and so on, should be corrected (though as an editor of a former volume, I know that one cannot achieve anything approaching perfection in such a project). . . .
>
> Finally, we may ask how these new editions compare with the earlier ones. As we have mentioned, the footnotes are significantly improved, standardized, corrected, sometimes with added bibliographic information (titles of articles and recent translations of books).[100]

> This volume [*The Prophetic Book of Mormon*] concludes the Book of Mormon component of *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*. The four Book of Mormon volumes in this series should be seen as a unit in order to understand the interrelated Book of Mormon insights of Nibley's mind and spirit.

testimony was "From what I've seen and heard, the gospel is true. Amen." Caldwell, e-mail correspondence, 9 October 2008.

99. Gee, e-mail correspondence to Huggins, 12 July 2006.

100. Todd Compton, review of *Lehi in the Desert, The World of the Jaredites, There Were Jaredites; An Approach to the Book of Mormon; Since Cumorah*, by Hugh Nibley, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 1 (1989): 116, 117–18.

> These four volumes could not have been collected, checked, edited, and published without the dedicated work of [list of names follows].[101]
>
> Literally thousands of hours have gone into the production of this volume: checking and double-checking references, typing, editing, consulting, confirming all sorts of details, and proofreading.[102]
>
> Many people have assisted with this volume. I am particularly glad to acknowledge their invaluable work, especially in checking citations and performing various other necessary editorial labors.[103]
>
> The source checking for this new edition was carried out meticulously. We have tried to make the sources accessible to the interested reader. Unfortunately, some of the sources cited in the original edition have proved impossible to find, mostly because the citations were made parenthetically with numbers that referred to a numbered bibliographic list; typographical errors in those numbers have made the sources difficult or impossible to find. In a few cases, we have retained the material without source citation for whatever value it may have for the reader; in those cases we have indicated in an endnote that the source was not found.[104]
>
> Joseph Ponczoch worked on the monumental task of determining the source of each quotation in the text. . . . This proved truly formidable because fewer than one of every twenty quotations in the typescript included even minimal citation information. . . . Because of the condition of the origi-

101. John W. Welch, in *The Prophetic Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1989), x.

102. Don E. Norton, in *Approaching Zion*, xviii.

103. David J. Whittaker, in *Tinkling Cymbals and Sounding Brass* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), xvii.

104. Gary P. Gillum, in *Abraham in Egypt*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 2000), xxix.

nal manuscript and the considerable interval of time since its composition [class lectures from 1954], we and our assistants (even with Nibley's suggestions) have been unable to locate the sources of all references. . . . Footnotes indicate those quotations that stem from still unidentified sources.[105]

We have checked all the citations in the more than four thousand footnotes. I myself have checked over half of them. Since Nibley made his own translations from all foreign languages except where noted, we have given him wide latitude in rendering his translations. . . . Except for the education it has given the source checkers, the process of checking the footnotes has been, for the most part, unnecessary. Analysis of a random chapter showed that of its almost seven hundred citations, Nibley was completely accurate 94 percent of the time, and in more than half of these remaining forty cases, one could explain the problem as a typographical error. Nibley is more accurate than most Egyptologists whose footnotes I have checked, and several times I have been amazed at how his translations of passages have correctly interpreted the grammar of Egyptian while the standard Egyptological translations have not. In this edition, as in other editions of the Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, notes have been expanded to include full bibliographic information. . . . The content has also been checked and adjusted if necessary. Despite our best efforts, there may still be mistakes, and in the end Nibley is responsible for his own footnotes, but readers should expect to find that the source is where Nibley says it is and that it says what he said it said.[106]

105. John F. Hall and John W. Welch, in *Apostles and Bishops in Early Christianity* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 2005), ix–x. Note that Douglas F. Salmon has since identified the majority of the unidentified references.

106. John Gee, in *Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri*, xx.