

BEYOND SCHOLARSHIP: SCENES BEHIND THE NIBLEY WRITTEN LEGACY

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I am very pleased to speak at this occasion, on this program, in honor of the centennial of Hugh Nibley's birth on March 27, 1910, and to mark the completion of the Collected Works of Hugh Nibley (CWHN).¹ We miss Hugh in many ways, he having died five years before his signature series was finally completed. I hope that my comments here will help the next generation of serious readers, genuine disciples, and broad-gauged scholars everywhere to find, appreciate, and make solid use of the valuable written contributions generously left behind for us by our inspiring mentor, dedicated friend, and gleeful gadfly, Hugh Nibley.

This, of course, is not the first time that we and his many admirers have gathered to speak in praise of Hugh. But this time is different, precisely because he is not here to protest. He loathed praise or recognition. In this and in other ways, he was a conscientious objector.

Earlier Celebrations

Back in March 1975, a group of us, mostly students who were inspired by Hugh to go on into various graduate programs, convened a two-day event in the BYU Wilkinson Center to celebrate Hugh's sixty-fifth birthday. The festivities included presentations by Professor Klaus Baer, whom we (together with the BYU Honors Program) brought from the University of Chicago to Provo for the occasion.² Papers were presented by a dozen young scholars. Our papers were assembled and presented to Hugh in a bound booklet which we entitled *Tinkling Cymbals*.³ After all, he had written a book entitled *Sounding Brass*,⁴ criticizing publications that had

taken potshots at Brigham Young. We hoped that our modest, fledgling efforts might be pleasing to him, and, actually, several of those papers were eventually published.⁵

Then in 1985, we gathered again to mark his seventy-fifth birthday. This time we celebrated with the premier screening of the film *The Faith of an Observer*⁶ and with the launching of what would become a two-volume Festschrift in Hugh's honor, entitled *By Study and Also by Faith*,⁷ published in 1990, thanks especially to the determination of editors John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks. I mention this celebratory outpouring, complete with forty-six lengthy chapters, spanning 1,400 pages, just to indicate the extraordinary number of minds and hearts that Hugh had not just touched but had transformed. Anyone serious about the history of Latter-day Saint scholarship is seriously deficient if they have not watched, perhaps multiple times, *The Faith of an Observer*, pored over the biography written by Boyd Jay Petersen,⁸ and savored the two-volume Festschrift. These are all background to reading the nineteen volumes of the CWHN themselves.

It would be presumptuous, if not preposterous, to try to summarize all of this landmark series in a short presentation on this occasion. The monumental scope and effect of Hugh Nibley's written record has moved whole ranges of inert cerebral mountains. I have had the privilege of introducing Hugh on a number of occasions. He had been my Book of Mormon teacher. He was the first person I told about my discovery of chiasmus in the Book of Mormon upon my return to Provo as a college junior from my mission. He immediately encouraged me to write a master's thesis on that subject, and he became my thesis advisor, a rarity for Hugh. I eventually became the general editor of the CWHN. So I have been placed on many occasions in the ticklish position of translating, or brokering, Hugh Nibley to various audiences, to academicians such as James H. Charlesworth, or to hordes of readers of his works. It is very gratifying to mark the completion of the CWHN series here in 2010, after being twenty-five years in process.

Introductory Pieces to CWHN

Rather than repeating these previous introductions, let me just mention here several of my introductory pieces that continue to be



Figure 1. Part of the FARMS group that flew to Oakland CA, courtesy of Dick Winwood, on April 19, 1996, for a repeat of several papers presented at a conference in Provo, Utah, the Saturday before. Left to right: three airplane operators or assistants, Brent Hall, Jack Welch, Terry Szink, Hugh Nibley, Gordon Thomasson, Jeannie Welch, Catherine Thomas, and Phyllis Nibley. Papers from this conference, which included Nibley's "Assembly and Atonement," were published in the 1998 volume, *King Benjamin's Speech*,³⁴ dedicated to Phyllis as well as Colleen Maxwell.³⁵

available, making informative and fun reading about who Hugh Nibley was and what he cared about. There was an article in 1985 that I was asked to publish in the *Ensign* entitled "Hugh Nibley and the Book of Mormon."⁹ There was also a piece in the 1980s that ran in the *This People* magazine called "The Timelessness of Hugh Nibley."¹⁰ My introduction to the 1990 Festschrift, *By Study and Also by Faith*, was entitled "A Doorkeeper in the House of the Lord,"¹¹ and it appeared in that two-volume set together with a companion piece written by former Academic Vice President Robert K. Thomas, entitled "The Influence of Hugh Nibley: His Presence in the University."¹² But my feelings were most poignant when I spoke at Hugh's funeral in 2005. My words on that occasion were published as "Hugh Nibley's Articles of Faith."¹³ There I reflected on Hugh's axioms of faith and how closely his published corpus aligned completely with all of the thirteen Articles of Faith. To be sure, Hugh was different, but he was not off-center. He was orthodox to the core.

In recognition, mainly of the stream of amazingly solid articles that Nibley published between 1953 and 1965 in non-Latter-day Saint journals, Hugh was awarded the honor of being the second Distinguished Faculty Lecturer in 1965. Most of these works are found in the CWHN, vol. 10, *The Ancient State*. Those classic publications included “The Unsolved Loyalty Problem,” in *Western Political Quarterly* (1953); “The Rise of Rhetoric and the Decline of Everything Else,” in *Western Speech* (1959); “The Christian Envy of the Temple,” in *Jewish Quarterly Review* (1959–1960); “The Passing of the Church,” in *Church History* (1961); “Three Shrines: Mantic, Sophic, and the Sophistic” (1963, delivered at Yale); and soon to follow, “Tenting, Toll, and Taxing,” in *Western Political Quarterly* (1966), which was recently cited in Oxford’s *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Law* (see vol. 2, p. 360).

I see Nibley’s works as a great river of ideas constantly flowing into the fountain of all righteousness, to which I hope we all may become tributaries. I see his influence as being more relevant and more needed today than ever before.

Hugh Nibley was an editor’s dream. He worked incredibly rapidly and spoke spontaneously and elegantly on timely issues. Hugh Nibley was also an editor’s nightmare as well. Using unusual sources and dozens of languages, his footnotes were amazingly correct—but very difficult to source check.

Although the mass of his works can be very daunting, if you want a good point of entry to get into Hugh Nibley, the articles in *BYU Studies Quarterly* are a good place to start. They are accessible, readable, interesting, and cover the whole range of most of the things he was interested in.

Some examples include the following:

- 1965—“The Expanding Gospel.” This was Nibley’s first article to appear in *BYU Studies*. Here in 1965 he spoke about the big picture of the plan of salvation. His combination of highest scholarship and deepest discipleship set a whole new tone for *BYU Studies* and all of its readers. As a freshman, I attended this presentation on March 17, 1965.
- 1968 saw three articles about the Book of Abraham—“Prolegomena to Any Study of the Book of Abraham,” “Getting Ready to Begin” (an editorial), and “As Things

Stand at the Moment.” The discovery in 1967 of some of the Joseph Smith Papyri jumpstarted Nibley’s career-changing track moving off the Book of Mormon and onto the Book of Abraham. Nibley had begun studying Egyptian almost a decade earlier, wondering to himself, “Why?” Now he knew why.

- 1969—“How to Have a Quiet Campus, Antique Style.” In response to a speech at BYU by Spiro T. Agnew, then vice president of the United States, Nibley wrote a bluntly truthful satirical masterpiece. Using coded language, he criticized the ancient Greek practice of focusing educational pursuits on careers and using dress and grooming codes to reign in student dissent. Only Hugh could entertain us so well while being so deadly serious.
- 1970—“Educating the Saints: A Brigham Young Mosaic.” This should be required reading for all Latter-day Saint scholars, students, and educators. In it, Nibley warns against ulterior motives in seeking an education.
- 1971 saw additional articles in *BYU Studies* about the Book of Abraham—“What Is the Book of Breathings?” and “The Meaning of the Kirtland Egyptian Papers.” Nibley saw a pattern of education in the Kirtland Egyptian papers—a pattern that we must all follow in seeking greater light and knowledge.
- 1973—Review essay of *Bar-Kochba*, by Yigael Yadin. In this article, Nibley points out how the Book of Mormon name Alma is found in ancient Israel—proving that it was a Jewish name from ancient times.
- 1974—“Beyond Politics.” This article was not included in the CWHN at Nibley’s request. The version published in *BYU Studies* wasn’t polished enough for Nibley’s tastes. But a later version containing a footnote Nibley apparently wanted corrected was finally published in 2011¹⁴ with an explanatory introduction about its belated appearance by Louis Midgley and Shirley Ricks.¹⁵
- 1975—“The Passing of the Church: Forty Variations on an Unpopular Theme.” This was an article that had been published in the academic journal *Church History*. The *BYU Studies* publication made this extensive work on the Great Apostasy available to a wider circle of Latter-day Saint readers.

- 1978—“The Early Christian Prayer Circle.” This brilliant piece showed that in obscure texts the Apostles and their wives indeed gathered in circles to pray together with Jesus. It shows that the ideas of Joseph Smith about temples was not strange to the early Christians.
- 1985—“Scriptural Perspectives on How to Survive the Calamities of the Last Days.” This was his last publication in *BYU Studies*, appearing on his seventy-fifth birthday. Could there be any subject still more relevant?

Now to the story of the CWHN series.

The Beginnings of CWHN

From 1980 onward, Hugh Nibley and the fledgling Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS) had been joined at the hip. Hugh was happy to have his name listed as a member of the FARMS board when it began to mail out periodic newsletters in 1981. FARMS soon began offering Xerox copies of significant articles about the Book of Mormon in a series called the FARMS Reprints. Several of Nibley’s hard-to-find articles were distributed among these reprints. That was a day before digital copies, email, or the widespread availability of the internet. The demand for these reprints was truly modest by today’s standards. But for its day, the number of copies made and conveniently mailed out was phenomenal and sensational. Never before had these articles, which had appeared long before in Church magazines, in *BYU Studies*, and elsewhere, been so easily accessible to a new generation of readers and serious students.

At the same time, FARMS workers began assembling a collection of bibliographical information about such things as publications about chiasmus, about temples in the ancient world, about transoceanic voyaging before Columbus, about biblical law, and about the manifold publications of Hugh Nibley. Out of the Nibley bibliography, the CWHN readily grew.

For twenty-six years I was the general editor of CWHN, the series of volumes that ended this month with the publication of volume 19, *One Eternal Round*, considered Nibley’s masterwork.¹⁶ It arrived just in time for what would have been the late Nibley’s one hundredth birthday on March 27.

The story of the CWHN up through 2002 had already been told in part by Boyd Petersen in his masterful biography.¹⁷ The following telling, with additional details interspersed, draws with permission upon selected quotes from Petersen.¹⁸ Picking up in 1984, Petersen recalls that then BYU president Jeffrey R. Holland suggested to Truman Madsen that a second volume of *Nibley on the Timely and the Timeless*¹⁹ might be welcome: “As I look at the Nibley corpus,” wrote Holland, “it seems to me unfortunate that more of those are not available. Is there any way in which a second volume might be pursued?”²⁰

The backstory here was that Madsen had published the one and only volume entitled *Nibley on the Timely and the Timeless* back in 1978 when he was the director of Judeo-Christian studies at the newly formed Religious Studies Center (RSC), which Holland, who was then dean of Religious Education, had organized. In fact, Hugh did not like the original title of that book, *The Nibley Legacy*, and when he saw the page proofs for the thirteen papers it included, Hugh demanded that the title be changed. When Madsen explained that that would require re-typesetting the entire book, which would be very expensive (much harder to do then than now), Hugh said, “Well, take it out of my royalties.” To which Truman answered, “Do you care that much about a title?” And Hugh, true to form, responded, “No, I care that little about royalties.”²¹

In response to Holland’s 1984 suggestion, Truman, on February 23, then wrote back a reluctant refusal. Although “the Nibley volume has done better than any of the monographs” produced by the RSC, its officers did not want to “tie up further funds for a new edition. They want to underwrite new and other volumes in the series. Hence, no more Nibley.”²²

In fact, it was not just an issue of money. *The Timely and the Timeless* had done very well—better than anything else the fledgling RSC had published to date. Many factors may have been involved, but the real underlying issue was over dogma and methodology. Many faculty members in Religious Education those days were dubious about Hugh’s academic tactics. Of course, none of them knew the languages or the sources that he was working with. But they had been instructed that knowing ancient languages was actually a serious impediment to understanding the scriptures.

One director of the RSC berated me in 1986 for having FARMS distribute Nibley reprints and for launching the Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, even if they were to be copublished together with Deseret Book. He said, in no uncertain terms, “No one has done more harm to the Church than Hugh Nibley.” So, it was not a slam-dunk or a cakewalk to get the CWHN off the ground, even at BYU.

This sentiment explains why none of Nibley’s contemporaries in Religious Education were among the self-acclaimed group “collected workers of Hugh Nibley,” who set to work organizing and source-checking every footnote, confirming every one of his translations from ancient and modern languages, editing (with Phyllis Nibley’s eagle-eye help), proofreading, and doing everything—for a quarter of a century—to deliver to Deseret Book the final word-processed typescripts ready for layout and printing. All that said, the RSC did contribute a small amount to help prepare *The World and the Prophets* (CWHN, vol. 3) for publication, not so much because the contents of that series of KSL radio talks were unproblematic, but because at that point I was the director of special projects in the RSC, appointed to that university assignment by President Holland.

But at that time, in 1984:

Holland may not have known that [FARMS] was already planning an even more ambitious publishing project [than just a second scant anthology]. John W. Welch, one of Hugh’s former students, [who had practiced] tax law in Los Angeles, [had joined the BYU faculty in 1980]. He had learned about chiasmic structures as [a missionary in Germany, having had Nibley as his Book of Mormon teacher as a freshman at BYU], discovered [chiasmic structures] in the Book of Mormon, and remained strongly interested in Book of Mormon research. During the 1970s, he addressed many LDS audiences about Book of Mormon research and found a great interest among Mormons in articles, including many by Hugh, that his audience had either never heard of or had no idea how to obtain. Welch began to photocopy articles and send them to interested members. The demand soon became greater than Welch could handle on his own, so he organized [a California nonprofit corporation], the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS), with the principle task of making research on the Book of Mormon available at a minimal cost. By 1982, FARMS

had issued a catalogue of articles which it sent [free to its mailing list]. Soon thereafter, the organization established the goal of bringing together [all of] Hugh's collected works. As Welch puts it, "We knew that FARMS needed to build directly on the scholarly work of Hugh Nibley, who had taught many of us as students, and we knew that our future was closely aligned with his past."

In 1983, FARMS board members divided up the entire Nibley corpus, by subject, and assigned editors for [many of] the projected volumes. A team of volunteers tirelessly assembled materials, typed manuscripts, checked footnotes, and proofread hundreds of essays which would appear in the [then already] projected [and now actually published] nineteen-volume *Collected Works*. Welch negotiated an agreement with Deseret Book to co-publish the series [along with a series of other FARMS works, such as John L. Sorenson's *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*²³ and others that would soon follow]; and by March 1986, the first volume, *Old Testament and Related Studies*,²⁴ appeared in print. The second volume, *Enoch the Prophet*,²⁵ appeared later that same year.²⁶

The first nine of the volumes in the CWHN came out in very rapid succession, mainly because we divided the corpus up at the outset into the overall series, and various editors volunteered readily to begin shepherding each volume through the mass-produced, assembly-line teamwork of source-checking sessions many of us came to participate in. For those source-checking days in the Harold B. Lee Library, Gary Gillum brought into a workroom as many of the sources as could be gathered off of the library shelves. It was especially fun to locate and confirm Nibley's page numbers and quotes, since he typically read with a pencil in hand and left his idiosyncratic shorthand notes in the margins of many places that had caught his attention. We were motivated in this process by the desire to meet deadlines, so that the release of the early volumes in the CWHN could coincide with the Gospel Doctrine class curriculums for those years in the 1980s.

While this work was just getting underway, two other important efforts were simultaneously in process. In 1985, not only was the previously mentioned conference convened celebrating Hugh's seventy-fifth birthday, but also at the same time the film

documentary *The Faith of an Observer* was being produced and released. As Petersen relates,

One of the individuals interviewed for this documentary was Elder Neal A. Maxwell. Responding to a question, he explained how, a few years earlier, the Brethren had asked Hugh to compile material on the Savior's atonement. "It was a feeling I had as well as some others—Truman Madsen, President Hinckley, and the Brethren—that he can take all of the manuscripts, ancient and modern, and integrate them into a wholeness such as no one else could do," explained Maxwell. Hugh responded by writing "The Meaning of the Atonement," which he read at a lecture sponsored by FARMS and Deseret Book in Riverton, Utah, on 11 November 1988.²⁷ Hugh described the atonement as a state in which "one rejoins the family, returns to the Father, becomes united, reconciled, embracing and sitting down happily with others after a sad separation." Hugh constructed this meaning from ancient Near East rituals and their endowment parallels. "This is the imagery of the Atonement, the embrace," stated Hugh. "This is the *hpet*, the ritual embrace that consummates the final escape from death in the Egyptian funerary texts and reliefs."

After Hugh had finished the speech, Maxwell expressed the hope that "some wider use might be made" of the material, "perhaps several articles in the *Ensign*. . . . I would like [it] to be shared as widely and appropriately as possible. As is so often the case with you, Hugh, you have spun off so many fine things for so many different audiences." As to the many allusions to the temple, Elder Maxwell cautioned: "You may want to let any temple-related imagery speak for itself, as you have always done so adroitly." He concluded: "Thanks again for what seems to me to be the crescendo of your own marvelous ministry in which the focus, so appropriately, is on Christ in the centerpiece of the atonement." With Elder Maxwell's support, an edited version of the lecture later appeared in a four-part *Ensign* series.²⁸

Personal Comments on Each of the CWHN Volumes

Here are a few notes and personal comments about how and when each of the volumes in the CWHN came forth:

- Volume 1, *Old Testament and Related Studies* (1986), was edited by Gary Gillum (the all-time champion BYU ancient studies librarian and Nibley bibliophile) and by Don Norton (the always-editing English professor and no-nonsense mantic). This volume began in the beginning with Genesis, even “Before Adam,” with “Patriarchy and Matriarchy” and with several studies that point out new developments and documents that were coming forth in the Dead Sea Scrolls and also from early Christian writings that contained “Insights into the Organizing of Worlds” (as stated in the subheading for this article as originally published in 1973). As the general editor, I included in this initial volume a foreword to this newly hatched and very ambitious undertaking. As I often pointed out, Nibley’s life’s work “is a rare combination of faith and scholarship, of teaching and research, of orthodoxy and eccentricity, of rigor and homily, of spontaneity and tedium, of anonymity and legend, of an intimidating genius with a genuine humility” (vii).
- Volume 2, *Enoch the Prophet* (1986), was edited by Stephen D. Ricks, a young, energized faculty member teaching Hebrew and other Semitic languages at BYU. These pages contain two papers and a long series about Enoch that appeared between 1974 and 1977, as Nibley and biblical scholars were awakening to the importance of the Old Testament pseudepigrapha in general and the so-called Enoch literature in specific. In these articles, Nibley made his greatest foray into the meticulous study of the Enoch material in the Book of Moses, a topic which has only recently received renewed attention.

As Boyd Petersen noted, right off the bat, “Giving the series a degree of authority that other LDS books lacked, Gordon B. Hinckley, then First Counselor to President Ezra Taft Benson, commented on the series in the April 1986 general conference.”²⁹

The next year, 1987, two more volumes would appear:

- Volume 3, *The World and the Prophets* (1987) was also edited and produced by Gillum, Norton, and Welch, with a foreword we solicited by R. Douglas Phillips, professor of classical languages at BYU, devoted protégé of Nibley, and also the Greek teacher of many of us involved with the CWHN. Typical of this effort, the foreword gives thanks

to a dozen people for their work and financial support in bringing this volume, first published in 1954 by Deseret Book, back into print.

- Volume 4, *Mormonism and Early Christianity* (1987), was handled by Todd Compton and Stephen Ricks. It contains the brilliant series of articles that Nibley produced about long-lost reports or traditions about beliefs and practices that are of great interest to Latter-day Saints and also were known in the first few centuries after Christ. Topics include what Jesus was said to have taught and done during the forty days between his resurrection and his ascension (found in the so-called forty-day literature, which can be compared favorably with what Jesus taught and did in 3 Nephi), in addition to the use of prayer circles, baptism for the dead, and what Nibley ingeniously called “the Christian envy of the temple.” Some of these chapters were first published in top-tier Christian and Jewish journals and were now made readily available (in most cases for the first time) to general readers.

After the fourth volume came out, Elder Neal A. Maxwell in a more private setting called the series “a blessing for the Church,” and Elder Dallin H. Oaks called it an “epic contribution.”³⁰

I then took charge of editing the block of the four volumes on the Book of Mormon:

- Volume 5, *Lehi in the Desert, The World of the Jaredites, There Were Jaredites* (1988), was edited with help from Darrell Matthews and one of my law students, Stephen Callister. The contents of this volume had been published in the 1940s and 1950s in the Church’s main magazine in those years called the *Improvement Era*.
- Volume 6, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon* (1988), restored the questions that had originally appeared at the end of each chapter when this book was used in 1957 as a Melchizedek Priesthood course of study throughout the Church. In deciding to adopt this as the priesthood lesson manual for that year, President David O. McKay was asked if, perhaps, this book might be over the heads of some of the brothers. He replied, “Well, let them reach.”
- Volume 7, *Since Cumorah* (1988, reprinting the 1967 edition), also had appeared in the *Improvement Era* in a

series that processed many recent discoveries relevant to the Book of Mormon that had come forth particularly since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran in 1947, some of which were beginning to be translated and discussed in academic circles in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

- Volume 8, *The Prophetic Book of Mormon* (1989), collected twenty-three miscellaneous articles published by Nibley about the Book of Mormon, including his own retrospective forty years later, looking back on his first publications in the 1940s about Lehi in Arabia. Hugh signed my copy of this book, “To Jack, Who did all the work, from Hugh Nibley.” Not true, but we both smiled.
- Then, at the center of the CWHN came volume 9, an apex on education, politics, and society, entitled, *Approaching Zion* (also appearing in 1989). It was edited by Don Norton, assisted by a dozen volunteer collaborators (p. xviii). This volume is most likely the most popular, challenging, original, and insightful of all the CWHN. It is vintage Nibley. As the foreword concludes, “The title—*Approaching Zion*—is Hugh Nibley’s own. He explains, ‘It captures the theme and suggests movement toward that all-important goal, Zion.’” It contains provocative pieces about our glory or our condemnation; zeal without knowledge; how firm a foundation; how to get rich; work we must, but the lunch is free, but what kind of work?; weeping for Zion; change out of control; the law of consecration; and the meaning of the Atonement.
- Next, volume 10, *The Ancient State* (1991), was edited by Stephen Ricks and Donald Parry (a FARMS worker who had just completed his PhD and was hired by Stephen’s department at BYU). Here are ten massive articles that are truly classic Nibley. His prose in these studies, mostly published in the 1950s and 1960s in professional classical journals, as Stephen Ricks says, “is both strong and vigorous, while at the same time direct and without affectation—something we would expect, given his strong antipathy to the many seductions of rhetoric. Reading him is a constant pleasure, even where the argument is subtle or a page studded with details.”³¹

Seven of these ten volumes appeared during the very same years (1988–1991) when many of us at FARMS and on the faculty

at BYU were also laboring feverishly on the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*,³² whose four volumes were released by Macmillan and BYU on Thanksgiving weekend in 1991. On the editorial board of this encyclopedia were several friends of FARMS and of Hugh Nibley; most notably among those were Robert K. Thomas, Truman Madsen, Noel Reynolds, Charles Tate, Kent Brown, and myself. And with balanced discussions and readily achieving unanimous editorial board consensus, Nibley and his academic publications were well represented in that landmark library reference work.

As Boyd Petersen continues,

[By 1991] ten volumes of the collected works had appeared in print, and FARMS had also produced many other volumes of Mormon scholarship. “Those years were incredibly productive,” remembers Jack Welch. “Linked together was a tidal wave of new material, rising out of the huge ground swell of Nibley’s lifetime of precocious and prodigious publications.” The collected works of Hugh Nibley never could have happened without FARMS, and likewise FARMS could never have happened without Hugh Nibley. Both FARMS and Hugh benefitted from the venture. “FARMS could not have arisen without the foundation laid by Hugh Nibley,” states Welch. “And the new discoveries coming out of FARMS proved that Nibley was on the right track, that there was more where he was coming from, that he wasn’t the only one who saw the things he was claiming to have spotted.”³³

- Also appearing in 1991 was volume 11, *Tinkling Cymbals and Sounding Brass: The Art of Telling Tales about Joseph Smith and Brigham Young*. It was edited by David J. Whittaker, then the Mormon Collection librarian in BYU Special Collections. His thirteen-page foreword to this volume is extremely helpful in putting Nibley’s responses to the so-called anti-Mormon critics into the broad context of many efforts by Latter-day Saints, for over 130 years, to respond to inaccurate and hostile attacks. Materials in this volume include the 1946 pamphlet *No, Ma’am, That’s Not History* and articles from the *Improvement Era* in 1961 countering speculations about why the First Vision story was not discussed more openly in the early decades of the Church. The two main sections in this volume appeared in 1961 in

a book entitled *The Myth Makers* and in a second in 1963, *Sounding Brass*, both published by Bookcraft, which in the early 1990s had been acquired by Deseret Book.

- Volume 12, *Temple and Cosmos: Beyond This Ignorant Present* (1992), edited by Don Norton, was certainly one of the most compelling sets of studies and essays in Nibley's corpus, including articles on the meaning of the temple, sacred vestments, the expanding plan of salvation, the terrible questions, history and religion, the genesis of the written word, and notes on cultural diversity in the universal Church. As Norton states, "Except among Latter-day Saints, the notion of the temple had been all but lost to the world until early in this century, when scholars rediscovered (or perhaps simply began to acknowledge) the richly consistent stories (myths) and practices (rituals) in nearly all cultures" (p. xv), and Nibley brings all this to life (to eternal life) as he "most helpfully delineates the flatness of human attempts to avoid the big questions that all humanity poses. . . . Where did we come from? What is the purpose of life? What happens to us after death? These are the questions the temple answers" (p. xvi). Reflecting his persistent bottom line, Hugh signed my copy of this book, "To Jack, with Angst und Bange [with fear and trembling], Hugh N."
- Volume 13, *Brother Brigham Challenges the Saints* (1994), was edited by Don Norton and Shirley Ricks. As their foreword explains, Hugh's grandfather, Presiding Bishop Charles W. Nibley, had known Brigham Young personally and had shared stories with the Nibley family. In addition, Hugh had worked under Elder John A. Widtsoe in the late 1940s when his *Discourses of Brigham Young* was published (1954), and soon thereafter the *Journal of Discourses* (1956) appeared, containing about a thousand early speeches by General Authorities of the Church, including more than 350 talks by Brigham Young. Nibley was fascinated by the wit and wisdom of Brother Brigham, particularly on urgent topics such as the environment, politics, education, and leadership, rather than his rare remarks about much exaggerated odd topics.
- Volume 14, *Abraham in Egypt*, 2nd edition (2000), edited by Gary Gillum, included amazing illustrations directed by Michael Lyon. The first edition of this book was published by Deseret Book in 1981. Nibley's work on the Book of Abraham

began in the 1960s. For some reason, having mastered Greek, Latin, Arabic, and Hebrew, he was curiously drawn in 1960 into the continuing efforts of scholars to understand Egyptology, only to be called unexpectedly into service in working on some fragments found in the New York Metropolitan Museum in 1967. This volume deals with his initial efforts to make better sense of Facsimiles 1 and 3 in the Book of Abraham in the Pearl of Great Price. Facsimile 2, which Hugh continued to work on nearly until his death, will be dealt with in volume 19. Here in volume 14, Nibley mainly asks, what might Abraham have encountered in Egypt? As Douglas Clark explains in his foreword to this volume, Nibley here “takes us on a grand tour of many of those sources, pointing out their remarkable parallels with the Book of Abraham and filling in much of the background that Genesis leaves out” (p. xxiii).

- Volume 15, *Apostles and Bishops in Early Christianity* (2005), which I edited with John F. Hall, publishes a sheaf of lecture scripts that were used by Nibley in the 1950s in a class about bishops in Rome and elsewhere in the first five centuries of the Christian era. These notes had been forgotten and unseen until I found them when Hugh and I were looking for something else in an upstairs filing cabinet at the Nibley home.
- Volume 16, *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri*, 2nd edition (2005), edited by John Gee and Michael Rhodes, gives Nibley’s reconstruction of what he calls an Egyptian endowment with new illustrations by Michael Lyon. The first edition of this book was published by Deseret Book in 1975. Dealing first with the Book of Breathings, this Egyptian text is shown to be more than an obituary funeral text. It involves purification rites, temple entrance, the creation of mankind, a garden story, expulsion and the long road back, a fearful passage, and a readmittance. Echoes are also harvested from the Dead Sea Scrolls, the so-called early Syriac Christian *Odes of Solomon* and the *Hymn of the Pearl*, the Coptic *Pistis Sophia*, Cyril of Jerusalem’s *Lectures on the Ordinances*, and from the Nag Hammadi *Gospel of Philip*. All this was initially published by Deseret Book back in 1975 when Hugh (who had served on my committee for my master’s thesis on chiasmus in 1970) chiasmatically signed my copy, “Greetings to Jack Welch, to Welch (Jack) greetings.”



Figure 2. Complete set of nineteen CWHN volumes, plus the two *By Study and Also By Faith* volumes on the right.³⁶

- Volume 17, *Eloquent Witness: Nibley on Himself, Others, and the Temple* (2008), edited by Stephen Ricks, contains thirty-three miscellaneous pieces: autobiographies, interviews, book reviews by Nibley, forewords by Nibley, personal correspondences, and observations about temples.
- Volume 18, *An Approach to the Book of Abraham* (2009), edited by John Gee, includes a dozen essays on developments in the study of the Book of Abraham, together with another set of wonderful illustrations by Michael Lyon.
- Finally, volume 19, *One Eternal Round* (2010), coauthored by Hugh Nibley and Michael Rhodes, over 700 pages, completed after Hugh's death, focuses especially on the round Facsimile 2, a "hypocephalus" (literally a cosmic map on a round disk placed "under the head" of the mummy, of which there are over one hundred known examples). It also explores an array of related materials on myth, ritual, and history on Facsimile 1 accompanying the Book of Abraham; year-rite rituals and ascension dramas from dozens of cultures; the hermetic tradition; the Kabbala; Nimrod; and geometry. Around 1985, Hugh Nibley told me that Latter-day Saint Church president Spencer W. Kimball had promised Nibley that he would not die until his work here on this earth was finished. I decided that I wasn't going to push Hugh to finish this book any sooner than he wanted because then his work on earth would have been finished, and I didn't want to contribute to a premature demise. Hold on to your hat! There are reasons that this esoteric exploration into outer-religious space kept Nibley excited for the last twenty years of his life. In fact, when I made one of my last visits to Hugh, he was bedridden but was excitedly reading a book on geometry and abstract mathematics about which he said

he had a long list of questions and couldn't wait to get the answers.

In and through all of this, we have been changed. Since Hugh Nibley, we as a people are not the same. We are fed, but we must still plough.

So, thanks again, Hugh, for your bold prose, for your logic always tightly tethered to truth, for your rewarding and moving insights, and for your ever-expanding and everlasting faithful encouragement.

John W. Welch retired as the Robert K. Thomas Professor of Law at Brigham Young University in 2020. For twenty-seven years he was editor in chief of BYU Studies, the premier Latter-day Saint scholarly journal. He founded the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies in California in 1979. From 1988 to 1991, he served as one of the editors for Macmillan's Encyclopedia of Mormonism. As the general editor of the Collected Works of Hugh Nibley for 25 years, Welch directed the publication of the nineteen volumes in the series. Welch is among the most prominent pupils of Hugh Nibley, having made several important discoveries and advances regarding biblical studies, Latter-day Saint scholarship, history, culture, and thought. His publications cover a wide range of topics, including Roman and Jewish laws in the trial of Jesus, the use of biblical laws in colonial America, chiasmus in antiquity, and commentaries on the Sermon on the Mount and King Benjamin's speech.

Notes

1. Adapted from Michael De Groote's article in the *Deseret News*, "Hugh Nibley Writings That Changed the Church," at the BYU Neal A. Maxwell Institute Nibley Centennial Symposium on March 11, 2010, and supplemented with material from the March 10, 2010, BYU Studies Jubilee Symposium, which celebrated the completion of the nineteen volumes of the *Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*. This symposium preceded by a couple of weeks the celebration of Nibley's one hundredth birthday. Additional material about FARMS and the history of CWHN was added in 2020.

2. The Annual Welch Lecture was funded by John S. and Unitia Welch and was run by the Honors Program from 1972 to 1979. Annual speakers included historian Richard L. Bushman, psychologist Allen Bergin, law professor Frank Thomas Reed, Egyptologist Klaus Baer, New Testament and Dead Sea Scrolls scholar James H. Charlesworth, biochemist Robert L. Sinsheimer, and Old Testament expert David Noel Freedman.
3. The papers from the 1975 symposium were collected and presented to Hugh Nibley as John W. Welch, ed., *Tinkling Cymbals: Essays in Honor of Hugh Nibley* (Provo, UT: Privately circulated typescript, 1978). Copies of this collection were deposited in the L. Tom Perry Special Collections of the Harold B. Lee Library and elsewhere. Three of the papers were published in *BYU Studies* and one in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*. Three others would eventually appear in *By Study and Also by Faith*, the 1990 Festschrift in honor of Nibley's seventy-fifth birthday.
4. Together, the two titles completed Paul's couplet of "sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal" in 1 Corinthians 13:1. See Hugh Nibley, *Sounding Brass* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1963); Hugh Nibley, *Tinkling Cymbals and Sounding Brass: The Art of Telling Tales about Joseph Smith and Brigham Young* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: FARMS, 1991).
5. The three-day event on March 26–28, 1975, was sponsored by the BYU Honors Program together with the Annual Welch Lecture, along with the Institute for Ancient Studies, under the direction of Wilfred Griggs, the BYU College of Religious Instruction (Nibley's home department), and the ASBYU Academics Office. Lectures presented in Nibley's honor included Klaus Baer, "Temple Income and Taxation" and "Historical Role of the Temple in the Decline of the Old Kingdom"; as well as papers by C. Terry Warner, Arthur Henry King, Richard Haglund, Gordon Thomasson, Robert K. Thomas, Stephen Robinson, John W. Welch, Michael Rhodes, Paul Hoskisson, John Lundquist, and Michael Quinn.
6. Hugh Nibley, "The Faith of an Observer: Conversations with Hugh Nibley," in *Eloquent Witness: Nibley on Himself, Others, and the Temple* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: FARMS, 2008), 148–76. <http://www.bhporter.com/Hugh%20Nibley/The%20Faith%20of%20an%20Observer%20Conversations%20with%20hugh%20Nibley.pdf>. For the film itself, see Sterling Van Wagenen (producer), Brian Capener (writer, director, and photographer), and Alex Nibley (writer), *The Faith of an Observer: Conversations with Hugh Nibley* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2004), DVD and YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eYPVZvRXpIY>.

7. See John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks, eds., *By Study and Also by Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh W. Nibley on the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday, 27 March 1990*, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: FARMS, 1990).
8. See Boyd Jay Petersen, *Hugh Nibley: A Consecrated Life* (Draper, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2002).
9. Welch, "Hugh Nibley and the Book of Mormon," 433–50 (this volume).
10. See "The Timelessness of Hugh Nibley," *This People*, April 1987, 38–39, 42.
11. Welch, "Doorkeeper," 25–30 (this volume).
12. See "Influence of Hugh Nibley," 401–6 (this volume).
13. See Welch, "Hugh Nibley's Articles of Faith," 585–94 (this volume).
14. See Hugh Nibley, "Beyond Politics," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 23, no. 1 (2011): 133–51, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1841&context=msr>.
15. See Louis C. Midgley and Shirley S. Ricks, "Out of Obscurity: The Story of Nibley's 'Beyond Politics,'" *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 23, no. 1 (2011): 131–32, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1840&context=msr>.
16. Hugh Nibley and Michael D. Rhodes, *One Eternal Round* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: FARMS, 2010).
17. Petersen, *Hugh Nibley*.
18. See Petersen, *Hugh Nibley*, 372–76.
19. Hugh W. Nibley, *Nibley on the Timely and the Timeless: Classic Essays of Hugh W. Nibley*, ed. Truman G. Madsen (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1978).
20. Petersen, *Hugh Nibley*, 372–73.
21. See Petersen, *Hugh Nibley*, 348, for the full story. See also Nibley, "The Faith of an Observer," 154–55.
22. Petersen, *Hugh Nibley*, 373.
23. See John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: FARMS, 1985).
24. Hugh Nibley, *Old Testament and Related Studies* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: FARMS, 1986).
25. Hugh Nibley, *Enoch the Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: FARMS, 1986).
26. Petersen, *Hugh Nibley*, 373.
27. See Hugh Nibley, "The Meaning of the Atonement," in *Approaching Zion* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: FARMS, 1989), 554–614.
28. Petersen, *Hugh Nibley*, 376.
29. Petersen, *Hugh Nibley*, 373–74.
30. Petersen, *Hugh Nibley*, 374.

31. Stephen D. Ricks and Donald W. Parry, introduction to *The Ancient State: The Rulers and the Ruled*, by Hugh Nibley (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: FARMS, 1991), x.
32. See Daniel H. Ludlow, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4 vols. (New York City: Macmillan, 1992), <http://www.lib.byu.edu/Macmillan/>.
33. Petersen, *Hugh Nibley*, 374.
34. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks, eds., *King Benjamin's Speech: "That Ye May Learn Wisdom"* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998).
35. Nibley Collection, box 290, folder 21. Photo ID: HBLL-HughN-STW8462-EC2-Box290Folder21.jpeg.
36. Photo by Shirley S. Ricks. Photo ID: CWHN shelf.jpeg.