

# THE BYU FOLKLORE OF HUGH W. NIBLEY

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## Folklore and Hugh Nibley Contextualized

Folklore is “an artistic communication that occurs in face-to-face interactions among people with shared social identities.” Folklore occurs among all groups of people because stories are at the heart of human communication. As Neil Postman states, “Human beings require stories to give meaning to the facts of their existence. . . . A story provides a structure for our perceptions; only through stories do facts assume any meaning whatsoever.”<sup>1</sup> Stories thus help us to form our identities both as individuals and as groups. Postman refers to nations needing stories just as people need them, to provide themselves with a sense of continuity and direction. The same could be said for other groups, such as university faculties and staffs, which share many common interests and experiences. The more a common value center exists within a group, the larger the base of shared stories, and the more likely those are to cohere around common themes. The stories told in university communities often focus on or collect and gather around one particular hero. As Richard Dorson states in *American Folklore*, “Every college or university in the land possesses some odd faculty member whose behavior makes legends.”<sup>2</sup>

Brigham Young University, in Provo, Utah, is a community of approximately 28,000 students and 1,750 faculty and staff members. This tight-knit academic community is unique in its combination of high academic ideals and strict religious standards. BYU is unquestionably a religious institution, with the presiding members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints constituting the

board of trustees. With this strong religious emphasis in conjunction with secular learning, it is not surprising that the hero which the BYU community has chosen to revere through its stories is Professor Hugh W. Nibley, a man who has excelled in both scholarly and religious pursuits. Nibley's genius and devotion have combined with his eccentricity and absentmindedness to create a man of legends.

The stories that the BYU community tells of Nibley are not unfounded. He is an intellectual giant, as evidenced by his great academic accomplishments. After graduating summa cum laude in history from UCLA in 1934, Hugh Winder Nibley earned his doctorate degree from the University of California at Berkeley as a University Fellow in 1938. Fluent in over twenty languages, he has done specialized study in Coptic, Aramaic, and Egyptian. After teaching history and languages at Claremont Colleges, Scripps College, Pomona College, and UC Berkeley, all in California, he served in the war from September 1942 to November 1945. He came to teach at Brigham Young University, in Provo, Utah, in 1946, where he is currently professor emeritus of ancient scripture. In 1996, Nibley, at age eighty-six stopped teaching religion classes, but continued to work on various projects relating to Egypt and ancient scriptures. His last major project was a book on the hypocephalus (meaning "under-head"), the object which ancient Egyptians believed brought back the spark of life to mummies.

Dr. Nibley has won several awards, including Professor of the Year at BYU in 1972–73. He also won the David O. McKay Humanities Award in 1971. In 1979 he received the Alumni Distinguished Service Award. In 1983 he was awarded an honorary doctorate of letters at BYU. He was awarded a Religious Education Service Award in 1995 and an Exemplary Manhood Award in 1991. In 1995 his collected works were awarded a Latter-day Saint literature award. Nibley has also served as the director of the Institute of Ancient Studies.

A prolific writer with over three hundred titles in his bibliography, Nibley has published in a number of technical journals, including *Western Political Quarterly*, *Church History*, and *Encyclopedia Judaica*. He has also published in many Latter-day Saint journals and magazines, including the *Improvement Era*, *Ensign*, *Sunstone*,

and *Dialogue*. His scholarly focus over the past decade has been comparative world ritual, but in all of his various scholarly foci over more than a half century he has consistently proved that “the verve of his mind and style demonstrates that history need not be wooden, that technical mastery need not be obscure, and that learned writing need not be stripped of all references to faith.”<sup>3</sup>

Ever since I started my education at BYU in 1985, I have heard stories about Hugh Nibley from my professors and fellow students. Even before I had read anything by him, let alone met him, I had formed a clear mental image of Nibley. I imagined him to be wildly intelligent, passionately committed to the Church, and fearlessly bold in his scathing wit and actions. The first time I heard him speak was at a clean air symposium at BYU in the summer of 1987. He lived up to his reputation delightfully. On that occasion Nibley rebuked Geneva Steel and Joe Cannon, its CEO, by quoting scriptures, rattling off statistics, and spinning logic. I became intrigued with the man and have since read many of his books. My continuing interest in Hugh Nibley has been fueled by the stories which I continue to hear about him in my BYU classes, from fellow students and BYU alumni.

Over the past two years I have collected as many Nibley stories as I could from the faculty and staff of BYU. In listening to the stories and interviewing the tellers, I have learned a great deal about Hugh Nibley, but even more about those who tell stories about him. Folklore reveals who we are and what is important to us by revealing even more about the person *telling* the story than about the subject of the story itself. Because people cannot remember every story they hear, the ones they remember are important to them, for whatever reason. Telling stories is important because stories can fulfill basic needs of the teller. In the case of the BYU Nibley stories, the needs of the teller seem to center in a desire to admire a hero and fill a need to fit in and belong to a group, a need to feel superior, a need to reinforce paradigms, a wish to instill others with values one believes in, a need for wish fulfillment, or a need to be entertained.

Folklorist William A. Wilson describes folklore in the larger Latter-day Saint community in a way that applies readily to the smaller BYU community: “Because Mormon folk narratives are cut from the marrow of everyday experience and reflect the hopes,

fears, joys, and anxieties of common Church members, they bring us about as close as we are likely to get to Mormon hearts and minds.”<sup>24</sup> Extrapolating from the broad range of Hugh Nibley stories, I will examine why people tell stories about him and how the stories function in their lives.

The Nibley stories fall into patterns and recurring themes. Five main themes emerge in the stories I have collected:

- Nibley as hero,
- Nibley as iconoclast,
- Nibley as eccentric,
- Nibley as Latter-day Saint spiritual guide, and
- Nibley as humble but vigorous defender of the faith.

In nearly every story I have collected, Nibley is portrayed as an intellectual superman and a Latter-day Saint hero for other Latter-day Saints to emulate. A significant number of stories also portray Nibley as an iconoclast who attacks cherished beliefs and traditions which many proclaim to be Latter-day Saint beliefs. Most of his colleagues believe Nibley attacks unbending letter-of-the-law traditions but holds true to the spirit of the law. Nibley defenders assert that these beliefs need attacking because they are unnecessary customs which people follow blindly without realizing what they are doing.

In this role Nibley comes very near to playing the classic folklore “trickster,” and his bold actions in cutting to the quick of popularly held customs and beliefs are thrilling to watch, even though few would have the boldness to emulate them. Witness the daring in Nibley’s 1960s BYU commencement exercise prayer in which he said, “We have met here today clothed in the black robes of a false priesthood.”<sup>25</sup> Few people in the BYU community would have dared to utter such a statement, especially in a prayer, yet when Nibley did, many at BYU at once thrilled to such a bold statement and pondered the significance of his meaning.

Another facet of the trickster role which Nibley plays is the “eccentric professor” common to most every university. In such stories Nibley is brilliant, yet his socks don’t match, or he teaches a lecture from an open book while walking briskly across campus with students on either side feverishly scribbling down notes. Nibley tends

to be forgetful of such everyday concerns as whether his lawn is mowed or where his car is parked. He even gets so involved in his studies that he neglects emergencies like the time that a child of his was badly hurt, and he kept insisting he would be there in a minute to help. Finally a doctor called him from the emergency room, asking for permission to treat his son's badly broken arm.<sup>6</sup>

There are many stories about Nibley's spiritual knowledge. Some stories place him as unofficial prophet to the BYU community and the Church at large. Because he has labored to gain information and knowledge which are unrevealed to many others, people look to him for knowledge and light, as one who exemplifies Doctrine and Covenants 50:24: "He that receiveth light, and continueth in God, receiveth more light; and that light groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day." He is held up by many as a model Latter-day Saint scholar and Saint.

In addition to these themes, there are some minor, less complimentary themes. Some stories make Nibley an apologist or defender of the faith, which some professors consider to be closed-minded. Others present him as a pampered scholar-icon who has freedom because no one checks up on him. Nibley is notorious as a sloppy footnoter, and many stories emphasize how little Nibley cares about such scholarly conventions.

The telling of these stories raises the question of their veracity. While Hugh's brother Reid lightheartedly says the stories about his brother are "mostly wild enough to be true,"<sup>7</sup> some people become concerned over whether an event actually happened or not. As Michael Owen Jones has argued, when a cycle of stories develops around a notable figure, actual events in the figure's life are, in the stories, likely to be sloughed off or added according to what the people recounting the narratives want their hero to be. In other words, the hero becomes a reflection of them. What has been added or subtracted will, therefore, tell us much of the narrators, as Wilson states in relation to another Latter-day Saint folk hero, J. Golden Kimball, legendary member of the First Quorum of the Seventy in the Church, whose occasional and inadvertent lapses into swearing during his sermons endeared him to rank-and-file Latter-day Saints throughout the Church:

We should remember [reminds Wilson] that the J. Golden Kimball stories are, in the final analysis, no longer about J. Golden Kimball at all. They are about us. We are the ones who keep them alive by continual retelling and by continual reshaping. We should be concerned, I believe, not so much with trying to characterize Kimball but rather with trying to understand ourselves—trying to understand why we have created the kind of character who lives in the legend, and trying to discover what need the telling of the stories fills in our lives.<sup>8</sup>

It is seldom possible to verify where fact ends in folklore and embellishment begins. All of the stories included in my study appear to have some basis in fact. But even where stories directly contradict each other, they still reveal what Nibley means to the BYU community. The stories serve a function for those who tell them. Many of those I interviewed have had direct contact with Nibley and relate stories of events they actually witnessed or that they directly heard from Nibley. But whether the events really happened or not, the stories told from firsthand knowledge can be studied under the same microscope as those heard third- or fourthhand. All stories, including personal narration, are socially based. Stories are told in response to group expectations and therefore are adapted in ways that make them reflect the group. So, firsthand or not, all stories may be examined with the same question in mind: What need does the telling of Hugh Nibley stories fulfill for the BYU community?

In the process of telling these Hugh Nibley stories again and again, as members of the BYU community pass them along to others, the narrators transform the stories, probably unconsciously, into truthful and accurate indicators of their own values, attitudes, and needs. And this truthfulness may be more important, finally, than the factual accuracy of the stories—for we are inspired and moved to action not by what really happened but by what we believe happened. In this sense the stories are always true—true to the hearts, minds, and souls of those who tell them.

Whether remembering our group or individual pasts, stories fill the functions of codifying acceptable behavior, releasing tension, illustrating an important point, mitigating the harshness of life, and providing a unifying link among people in a community. Stories falling under these different categories will meet different

needs for the different people who are telling them. Stories are crucial to understand who we are. I echo Wilson's citing of Linda Dégh—folklore is “a sensitive [and immediate] indicator” of what we feel most deeply.<sup>9</sup> By studying the BYU stories of Hugh Nibley, we can better understand how deeply the BYU community of scholar-Saints feels about their faith and their roles as Latter-day Saint scholars.



*Figure 1. Bust of Hugh Nibley in the BYU Nibley Ancient Studies Room.<sup>206</sup>*

### **Hugh Nibley as a Hero**

Hugh Nibley fits all the standard definitions of a folk hero. As Roger Abrahams states, “A hero is a man whose deeds epitomize the . . . attributes most highly valued within . . . a society.”<sup>10</sup> Abrahams goes on to say that “heroism is the attainment of public acclaim by specific figures whose actions are seen as noteworthy and good, and, in most cases, worthy of emulation.”<sup>11</sup> At an institution of higher learning like BYU it is natural that the community admires Hugh Nibley’s heroic brilliance and scholarship.

Nibley breaks academic and religious stereotypes at BYU. Nibley himself has said, “To quote one of the greatest [Latter-day Saint] leaders, the founder of this institution [Brigham Young University]: ‘There’s too much of a sameness in this community.

. . . I am not a stereotyped Latter-day Saint . . . away with stereotyped “Mormons”—Goodbye all!”<sup>12</sup> This breaking of stereotypes is the main focus of BYU professors’ Nibley stories, the attribute for which they seem to admire him most. Reaching further and higher intellectually, he transcends the routine and therefore acts as a community hero.

When professors tell these heroic stories about Nibley in class, or to other friends and professors, the stories become folklore as the listeners aid in the communal re-creation. As William A. Wilson states,

An item of Mormon folklore, to have become folklore, must have moved from the individual expression of its originator to the communal expression of those who preserve it, losing, through the process of communal re-creation, . . . the marks of individual invention and assuming in time a form that reflects the consensus of the group.<sup>13</sup>

These communal Nibley stories reflect a vision of what these professors would like to be but, because of intellectual limitations, worldly concerns, or lack of courage, cannot be.

The stories surrounding Nibley’s heroism date back to before his birth. Latter-day Saints tend to prick up their ears when they hear that someone may have been “foreordained” to a certain calling—that they were chosen before time to fulfill a certain role. Latter-day Saints believe that this type of foreordination occurs in extraordinary circumstances and that when such an amazing child is to be born, often the mother is informed. In the Bible, every time an angel appears to a woman it is to announce the birth of an important child.

When Hugh Nibley’s mother was pregnant with him, she received a blessing from a General Authority of the Church in which she was told she would bear a son who was a choice servant or “chosen vessel” (depending on who is telling the story) of the Lord and that he would render great service to the Church. She was told to give him everything that he wanted because those things that he desired would help him in his service to the Church.<sup>14</sup> His mother apparently took this blessing very seriously, for Nibley had his own private library by the time he was eight.<sup>15</sup> As Richard Holzapfel



adds, "As a result [of his special calling], he didn't even have to do dishes. He had tutors; he was educated; he was taken care of."<sup>16</sup>

An interesting twist on this legend is that Sister Nibley, Hugh's mother, received this blessing from John R. Winder, the First Counselor to Latter-day Saint President Joseph F. Smith, and Nibley subsequently was named Hugh Winder Nibley. Even before he took his first breath, then, Nibley was a legend in the making.

Another sure sign that Nibley would become a Latter-day Saint and BYU hero is the fact that he comes from a powerful lineage. Charles W. Nibley, Hugh's grandfather, served in the First Presidency of the Church; in some stories Hugh would be visiting him at the Hotel Utah in Salt Lake City.

Stories about Nibley's youth are as rare as those in the New Testament about Jesus's growing up. But there is the classic account of his crawling around on the rug in his home and being fascinated by the Arabic script on it.<sup>17</sup> Perhaps the fact that the *Salt Lake Tribune* published a cartoon of this has perpetuated this story. There are also stories about his getting a French tutor when he was five and others of his teaching himself Greek at age ten.<sup>18</sup>

Nibley was born in Portland, Oregon, and grew up in Los Angeles, California. "He displayed precocity at an early age, being so far ahead of other students in his elementary school class that the principal took on the responsibility of giving him special tutoring."<sup>19</sup> He was not always the ideal student, however, and received many demerits for being lost in his own thoughts to the point of not paying attention to what the teacher was saying. While sometimes he would apparently wander away from class,<sup>20</sup> he was there enough to gain lasting insights. In high school Nibley belonged to the Shakespeare group, where the members would recite lines from the Bard until one of them made a mistake; consequently, says John Welch,



Figure 2. Ink sketch of Henry VIII.<sup>207</sup>



Figure 3. Hugh, age seven or eight.<sup>208</sup>

“Nibley still to this day will weave Shakespearean phrases into his talks and articles.”<sup>21</sup>

Hugh Nibley’s family was wealthy and socially prestigious. At an early age he learned how to interact with the impressive house guests his parents would entertain. But his parents always gave top priority to Hugh’s studies. If he were up in his room reading a book and didn’t want to come down to dinner, one of the servants would bring him dinner to his room on silver platters. Notes Welch, “He grew up literally with a silver spoon in his mouth.”<sup>22</sup>

Obviously Hugh Nibley (and his four musically gifted brothers and one sister) received

from his parents tremendous personal support and academic encouragement. Hugh has admitted, “Our mother pushed her kids.”<sup>23</sup> The Nibleys grew up in a predominantly Jewish area in Glendale, California, and Hugh’s mother apparently wanted her children to do better than the Jewish children in the neighborhood, many of whom were, like Hugh, overachievers. Despite his tremendous achievements, however, Nibley never quite lived up to his mother’s expectations. She had hoped that he would write a best-selling novel. Smiling at his human perversity, Nibley says, “Her wanting me to do it, of course, made it an achievement for which I had no desire.”<sup>24</sup> In fact, this stubborn streak is one of Nibley’s most respected characteristics. Even if he shunned the direct path that his mother had charted for him, he excelled under her motivating influence.

A youth with a voracious appetite for learning, Nibley embarked freely on his quest for knowledge. He recalls:



introduction, and there were maybe two, three hundred of us there, and he got up and spoke—it wasn't a prepared lecture; it was Hugh Nibley. And he just started talking, and then he said, "Oh, you can't understand this unless you understand the Greek." And then he wrote the sentence on the blackboard in Greek. And then he said, "Of course, this works even better in Latin." Then he went into Sanskrit. And he was just mumbling to himself about discoveries, and then would look up and say, "See!" And he'd get excited about the point and would point to this scribble on the board, and you could tell he was off in an *exciting* adventure. But we could only sense the excitement and could not understand the content. Everybody began to give that amused "Does anybody understand him?" look at each other—that laugh in that undertoned voice. We were not laughing at Hugh Nibley; we were laughing at his eccentricity and his enthusiasm, and we were appreciative, but we certainly were not *enlightened*. All we were enlightened by was, "Well, we don't know what he's saying, but we have faith it must be right, and this somehow must demonstrate the gospel, and aren't we grateful that Hugh is demonstrating that the gospel is true, even though we haven't got the slightest idea what he is saying?" And that was a bunch of educated men and women who were simply swept up in admiration of the *manner* of the man rather than anything he was saying in terms of *content*.<sup>30</sup>

The impression Nibley's professors/colleagues tend to give about Nibley's intellect is that he is so out of their realm that his abilities are difficult to comprehend. All they can do is sit back and admire. Interestingly, it is professors from the English Department who tend to emphasize stories about Nibley's ability with languages.

Nibley is a hero because he is an intellectual superman. His intelligence is probably his single most talked about attribute and the source of many stories. He is so brilliant, in fact, that as Wilson says, "When he took his PhD exams, they [the professors reviewing him] were all worried about who would examine him because they were afraid that he would show them up."<sup>31</sup> When I asked Wilson why he tells this story to others, he responded, "For me it just highlights the point that he is a very intelligent, capable person. So intelligent and capable that the professors were afraid to examine him for fear that he would show them up."<sup>32</sup>

There are several stories circulating about Nibley and his various dissertations. Apparently the first one he wrote was all mapped out on his famous three-by-five note cards—Nibley, being a practical man, used rejected catalog cards from the library; even in the 1930s Hugh Nibley was recycling. The cards were packed in shoeboxes that Nibley took with him everywhere. One day when he was in the grocery store, his shopping cart tipped over. All of his note cards spewed out and were sprawled out all over the floor.

He had been wrestling with his dissertation topic, trying to get something going with it. When he saw all of his note cards lying there on the floor, he said, “I didn’t like that subject very much anyway,” and he left the cards on the floor of the store.<sup>33</sup> Most scholars wouldn’t dream of starting from scratch after putting so much work into a dissertation. For Nibley there was no point in continuing if the subject was not interesting to him and if he wasn’t getting anywhere in the writing.

Another heroic aspect of Nibley’s intellect is the speed with which his mind works. One story which Don Norton tells illustrates this perfectly:

There’s the story that at Berkeley he wrote a dissertation and the committee rejected it because they said the subject was irrelevant. The subject was student riots in the ancient world. This was in 1934 at Berkeley. He went back and in a month wrote another dissertation. He holed himself up in a part of the apartment. He says he ate moldy carrots and drank condensed milk for a month and wrote it.<sup>34</sup>

Writing a dissertation in a month is nearly impossible to comprehend, but this story also illustrates how much ahead of his reviewers Nibley was by writing about the subject of riots, at Berkeley of all places. He seems to have a way of sensing what the important issues are even before history endorses his views on the subject.

Nibley’s mind is almost like a computer. Before the age of Infobases or WordCruncher or any type of computer program which could track all of the references on a particular topic, Nibley’s mind could do it on its own. John Welch sometimes asks Nibley what he knows about a particular word or phrase—for instance, priestcraft. Nibley thinks about it for ten minutes or so, and then he spouts out all that he knows.

It was like the computer had just been searching all through his mind and then out came one reference after another. He hadn't gone to an index and looked it up. But he talked about all of the contexts in which the word appears. I don't know how his mind is wired, but it has the ability to associate things.<sup>35</sup>

So Nibley, the man of brilliance, destined to be so before he was born, was given everything he needed in order to enhance his intellect.

Even more heroic than the academic stories are those revolving around his James Bond-like prowess in World War II. Nibley says that he ended up in the army by

volunteering for everything. You volunteer, they'll take you. Only suckers volunteer, but I just kept volunteering until I ended up in the worst position of all—Headquarters Company in the 101st Airborne Division, first to land in France.<sup>36</sup>



Figure 5. The “screaming eagle” of the 101st Airborne Division, 1984.<sup>210</sup>

Nibley was an intelligence officer in the war, and he crammed every pocket in his clothing with classified information. If he got shot, his superiors needed to be able to find the top secret information which he was carrying. Smuggled into one of those pockets, however, was a copy of the Book of Mormon—Nibley felt strongly enough about carrying it with him that he carried it wherever he went.<sup>37</sup>

Nibley appears larger than life in stories where he memorizes top secret information and destroys the documents in order to get through a checkpoint without having the papers discovered, only to return to London to repeat word for word what the documents contained.<sup>38</sup> There is even a war story about the heroic Nibley sneaking behind enemy lines and killing a man with a piano wire.<sup>39</sup>

Nibley spent most of his military service in Germany, where he had served a Latter-day Saint mission as a young man, thus learning before the war to speak fluent German. There is an interesting

story about Nibley going back to one of the areas which he had tracted on his mission. One house had been particularly unreceptive to the gospel, and he and his companion had cursed the place upon leaving. Nibley says, "Sure enough, when we came back the house was completely burned and all that was left was the stone doorway."<sup>40</sup> The universalizing hero elements here are clear. This same type of story is a very popular Latter-day Saint missionary folklore story. In one variation, the missionaries take their laundry to a laundromat where the owner hangs up their temple garments in the window for all to see. The missionaries curse the place, and the next time they return, the laundromat is burned to the ground.<sup>41</sup> This cyclical-type story has reattached itself to the Latter-day Saint hero Hugh Nibley. But the message is the same: Nibley is a man of God who has power that is not to be trifled with.

In another war story, Nibley is rifling through an officer's desk deep in the enemy camp when someone enters the room. "Thinking fast, Nibley pretended to be the janitor, and was not suspected of being a spy."<sup>42</sup> In another variation he is caught with his hand in the desk but simply says, "I've got what I came for," in fluent German; the officer "just stood there and didn't know whether or not to say anything until it was too late."<sup>43</sup> It is said that Nibley spoke German and many of its dialects so fluently that he could parachute behind enemy lines and "adopt the dialects and intonations of wherever he was, and was never suspected of being a foreigner."<sup>44</sup>

It is also told that Nibley had visions of many of the battles which took place before they happened. These visions were referred to as Hugh's "five a.m.ers," for the visions would awaken him at five a.m. In these visions he saw everything from a sunken USS *Arizona* to the Battle of the Bulge. In one story Nibley had been telling his superiors that there was going to be a counterattack; nobody believed him. Then when the German armies came rushing through, his commander yelled, "Get Hugh Nibley up here!" *Then* they took him seriously. They believed he had received advance warning.<sup>45</sup>

A favorite war story is told by Truman Madsen: landing with the Allied Forces at Normandy, Nibley was driving through the water in a specially adapted army jeep. Apparently Nibley had been pondering the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon, and while he was driving through the water up onto the beach, this thought

struck him: "It is ridiculous that the Book of Mormon should mention elephants. Oh, but it only mentions them in the book of Ether, which is 2,000 years BC. GREAT SCOTT, maybe the Book of Mormon is true after all."<sup>46</sup> As Madsen adds, "That is the kind of thought only Nibley would have going in on an invasion."<sup>47</sup>

All these war stories take place against a backdrop of constant reading, studying, and feeding his mind. Every European bookstore that he found he would enter. As Truman Madsen has put it to his colleague John Welch, "No more could he walk by a bookstore than an alcoholic could walk by a saloon."<sup>48</sup> The books which he purchased abroad formed the basis for many of his early articles.

It is important to remember that whether or not these stories are true, people in the BYU community tell them over and over and like to believe that they are true. These stories contribute to the legendary status of their hero Hugh Nibley. And in telling and retelling these Nibley stories, BYU professors reveal their attitudes, values, and concerns.<sup>49</sup> Because, at a university, two of the most commonly held values are intelligence and hard work. We may deduce, then, that those professors who tell these stories give high priority to both values and revere Hugh Nibley as a hero who embodies both.

In keeping with Nibley's legendary status, there is a story about him which puts him in the same class as Jesus himself. Just as the young Jesus went to the temple and amazed all of his elders with his knowledge and wisdom (see Luke 2:46–47), so there is a story about Nibley having a similar experience attending his first academic conference. The relatively young Nibley showed up wearing his fishing hat and cockily lurched into the presentation of his paper. Many in his audience were shocked by his unscholarly behavior. As he spoke, he would go off on tangents when he got a new idea and then eventually return to his original paper. He quoted huge manuscripts from memory, including passages in foreign languages. In the story, the chairman of the Harvard Divinity School leaned over to a colleague and said, "I don't like him. People who know that much make me nervous."<sup>50</sup> As the conference progressed, everyone began to look to Nibley whenever a question came up, and all deferred to the answers he gave because he cited sources they had never read. He would say to them, "After you have read such



and such you will understand this.”<sup>51</sup> Even as a budding professor, Nibley was respected as an authority.

Closely related to such professional heroism is Nibley’s prodigious capacity for learning and his unquenchable thirst for knowledge. There are stories about his being locked in the library on a Saturday night and not even realizing it and coming out on Monday just in time to meet his classes.<sup>52</sup> Some stories even suggest that, as an undergraduate, he would hide in the bathroom on purpose when the janitor was locking up.<sup>53</sup> In other stories he falls asleep in one of the bathroom stalls in the library and stays there until the janitor finds him.<sup>54</sup> Or there is the time he was the only one left in the library late at night, and the janitor asked him to help fix a leaky pipe in the basement. Nibley was to hold a flashlight, but soon the janitor could not see at all. Nibley had forgotten he was helping and had focused the flashlight on the book he had brought down with him.<sup>55</sup>

Nibley is also notorious for being very quiet whenever someone knocks on his office door so that he will not have to answer any questions and be disturbed in his work.<sup>56</sup> He would much rather continue feeding his mind than have to suffer idle conversation.

Illustrating how learning takes priority with Nibley, even above comfort, Kent Brown tells this story: “Nibley went to Chicago for a semester, and a different teacher was put in his office. This teacher had all the broken chairs removed and new ones put in. When Nibley returned, he asked why this had been done, and he was told that the old ones had been uncomfortable to sit on. ‘But that’s the point!’ he wailed.”<sup>57</sup>

Nibley is said to know extremely well more than twenty languages. There are jokes as to how well he knows languages. Mark Riddle, on the one hand, tells a story of Nibley seeing a bunch of international students in the library and saying hello to them in fifteen different languages.<sup>58</sup> On the other hand, Dan McKinley tells a story of Nibley’s stake president calling him out of the audience to speak, without warning. After Nibley sat down, the stake president said, “He’s the only one I know who can call you a dirty name in fourteen different languages.”<sup>59</sup>

Nibley has the ability to read “dead” languages (i.e., Egyptian, Sumerian, and Sanskrit) that few others can. Because of this ability,

it is said that he can read “closed” books. This ability to delve into “closed books” is often the teaser. The storyteller then explains how Nibley once visited a small Indian tribe in Arizona, who believed, according to their legend, that their god would return one day and read to them from a book that no one else in the tribe was able to read. When Nibley was able to read the book, a book closed to others, the tribe’s people became angry. They did not believe that Nibley was their god, so his ability was contrary to their legend. It is said that Nibley is forbidden to return to their village.<sup>60</sup>

Many professors express the belief that the ability to learn many different languages is a sure sign of a great scholar. “He can sit down for a couple of hours and get the basic feeling about a language. He can learn a language [well] in half a semester. Language is very exciting because it gets you to the original thought of the author, not what the translators think of the original thought. [Nibley] uses all original sources.”<sup>61</sup>

Charmingly, Nibley does not seem to consider his extraordinary language ability as extraordinary. One funny anecdote depicts someone asking Brother Nibley if he thought “they should give college credit for Greek. His reply was, ‘Heck no! Why should you give college credit for something you learn at your mother’s knee!’”<sup>62</sup> Obviously, Nibley must realize how ridiculous this sounds; it is refreshing that he does not seem to take himself too seriously.

There are stories which offer explanations as to how Nibley is able to memorize languages so proficiently. In his rhetoric class, Gary Hatch teaches the students many different techniques to increase the strength of their memories. One that he tells is of the “flip card” method, which Hatch learned in Denmark as a Latter-day Saint missionary. The system basically involves reviewing and reviewing an item systematically until it is retained in long-term memory. In Hatch’s mission, the story was told that Nibley invented the “flip card” system and was able to remember vast amounts of data because he used it so faithfully. Of particular interest for the folklorist is that Hatch himself doubts the veracity of the story:

When it [the flip-card method] was presented to us, one story circulating around the mission was that this system was invented by Hugh Nibley. I don’t know if it was or not, but they tie it to him because of his phenomenal ability with language

and with memory—as “Wow, this is the system Hugh used to learn all those languages.” But then you do see him with flip cards, so maybe that’s where it comes from, too, because when he’s going across campus or almost every time I’ve seen him he’s carrying those cards. And I’ve often wondered if he is re-viewing things using this system that he supposedly invented.<sup>63</sup>

Whether or not Nibley invented the exact system which the Danish missionaries used, he in fact uses three-by-five cards as aids to memorization. In 1984 it was estimated that he had sixty-five shoeboxes in his office with 1,500 references in each box.<sup>64</sup> And Nibley said that he had just as many of these cards at home. He hates to throw any of his cards away, though they are only for his own use. He says, “I’ve written the notes in different languages and thrown in a little shorthand once in a while.”<sup>65</sup>



Figure 6. Nibley three-by-five card holder.<sup>211</sup>



Figure 7. With a rifle over his shoulder, Hugh loses himself in a book that was lent him by a Russian woman.<sup>212</sup>

Nibley enhances his memory and his intelligence by always learning, and his life is a never-ending search for more knowledge. One of the most famous claims about Nibley is that he used to have a book propped up on the steering wheel when he drove.<sup>66</sup> In a 1990 *BYU Today* article, Nibley verifies this story. “Oh, I used to drive out to UCLA sixteen miles a day, and I had a Model T Ford, which cost me \$15. And I would always have a textbook on the steering wheel.”<sup>67</sup> The point is that no second is lost for learning, not even when he is driving or walking across campus. As Steven C. Walker remembers, “He doesn’t

do it now, but when I first knew him he was always reading as he walked across campus. I very often saw him with an open book. You never saw him trip or fall down. But I liked that, read as you go, I do that in the car myself. He can't get enough of the learning."<sup>68</sup> There is also a story of Nibley nearly walking into a set of sprinklers simply because, with his head buried in a book, he was not watching where he was going.<sup>69</sup> In keeping with this "learn wherever you are" mentality, Nibley also confesses to brainstorming while he swims. "I stay afloat and think of things. I solve problems in the pool."<sup>70</sup>

Professors are also impressed that he learns from whatever source he comes upon. Walker even observed him reading a classic comic book—during a priesthood meeting. While some might be critical of Nibley on two accounts here, Walker reveals his own open attitude when he states, "It said to me that he would learn from whatever source he could, even in high priests group meeting, even from classic comics. I think the reason he has such breadth of knowledge is that he just keeps piling it in there."<sup>71</sup> Folk narratives about Nibley reveal that he does not only read academic publications. There is a story about him standing in a bookstore, reading and chortling over a Phyllis Diller joke book.<sup>72</sup>

Nibley even learns from his students. One of Don Norton's favorite Nibley stories is about the time he and Nibley were chatting and Nibley was excited about a Book of Mormon class he was teaching: "Oh, I have these Book of Mormon students. It's amazing what those young people come up with. One of my students wrote a paper and pointed out something in the Book of Mormon, and I had never seen it! Isn't that amazing!"<sup>73</sup> Nibley acknowledges that anybody and everyone is in a position to teach him.

In another example of Nibley's willingness to learn from any source, Victor Ludlow tells of doing some research for Hugh Nibley. In the precomputer era, Nibley asked him to find in the library everything that he could about biblical Abraham. "You would think that Hugh Nibley, who has been here at BYU all these years, would know everything that is in the library, but he doesn't. He is so busy with his writing and teaching and what other responsibilities he had at that time, young children at home and all of that."<sup>74</sup> Ludlow respected that Nibley is always trying to learn everything he can about a subject. And his task was, and is, never

done. Even though he might know more than anyone else on a particular subject, he still thrives on seeing what new things might have come into the library. And by having another person check sources in the library, he makes sure that he has not left anything undiscovered. Ludlow also expressed his respect for Nibley's desire to see the larger perspective before drawing conclusions about minutiae.

Nibley's great and refreshing respect for all his students is quite remarkable considering the fact that in most cases he knows so much more than they do and therefore might be justifiably impatient with them. Liliane Zmolek observed him lecturing and said, "Never was there a hint of impatience at their [the students'] ignorant questions—only a general impatience that he couldn't [ever] read his lecture quickly enough to finish before the time was through."<sup>75</sup>

Nibley's focus on learning is so intense it leaves no time for other pursuits. "I used to occasionally go to a football game," Nibley has said. "I don't go anymore, however—I haven't enough time because I have too many important things left to do."<sup>76</sup> This unwillingness to waste time is illustrated by the oft-told story of his walking out on KBYU. When Nibley arrived at KBYU to record a closed-circuit television program, he was asked to wait. Nibley had arrived on time and expected things to be running on schedule. When he felt he had waited long enough, he got up and left, and the segment never was recorded.<sup>77</sup> John Welch mentioned that when Nibley knows he will be forced to wait, he often brings along his three-by-fives, so no second will be wasted.<sup>78</sup>

Nibley's love for learning overflows to his children. Many stories describe how learned his children are. One anecdote claims that when his daughter was only three, she knew all the Latin names for animals; another relates that when one of his sons was eleven he wrote an article on Solomon's temple for the *Improvement Era*.<sup>79</sup> Richard Holzapfel tells a story about Nibley's youngest daughter, Zina: on one of her first days of school the teacher asked everyone who could to write his or her name on a piece of paper. After the teacher collected all of the papers, she asked which student had done some particular drawings on the piece of paper she held up. Zina raised her hand and said, "That's mine." When the teacher

asked if she could write her name or not, Zina answered, “That’s [my name in] Egyptian hieroglyphics.” The teacher didn’t believe her until she found out her last name was Nibley.<sup>80</sup>

Nibley is transcendent, going above and beyond the expected in both his learning and his teaching. In so doing he does things that many people would consider “going the extra mile.” William A. Wilson illustrates this trait:

During the early sixties I was walking across the campus. And I saw him walking with a couple of students on each side. And as I observed at close range, he was lecturing to these students or disciples. At least they were people who hung on to his every word, because these people were desperately taking notes on both sides as they walked across campus, trying to get down what he had said.<sup>81</sup>

This story illustrates many elements of the Nibley-as-hero myth. First of all, he makes good use of his time. Second, others try to learn from his immense knowledge. Finally, he goes beyond his job description in order to learn and teach whenever and wherever he can.

Someone who is willing to commit so much life and energy to learning has a deep-seated passion, even a compulsion to find things out and to get jobs done. “Once when [Nibley] was traveling on his mission, he got off the bus, and he was throwing rocks at a sign and couldn’t hit it and would not get back on the bus until he hit it. He had this compulsion and passion in everything he did.”<sup>82</sup> Certainly, Nibley has a compulsion and passion for learning, especially of the gospel according to the Latter-day Saints. One time he said to a class, “One of the students came to me and asked me what was going to be on the exam. Hell, you’re in here to satisfy your curiosity, not mine.”<sup>83</sup> It is interesting how he assumes that everyone shares his quest for knowledge. Norton surmises, “The main thing that motivates him is the excitement of satisfying his own curiosity. He just can’t stand not to know what the hell happened in history. It’s just a consuming passion with him.”<sup>84</sup>

It would be interesting to know if Nibley is aware of his own reputation as an intellectual giant. In one story Wilson gives the impression that he is, except that the story is apparently untrue:

Marshall Craig, former chair of the English Department, long-time English Department faculty member, had been in the library and had checked out dozens of books and was struggling out of the library with his arms full of these books, trying to keep them balanced, and as he left the library he passed Hugh Nibley coming in. And Hugh Nibley looked at him and said, "Huh. You look like Hugh Nibley."<sup>85</sup>

Whether Nibley is aware of his reputation or not is irrelevant. What is interesting is how many stories reinforce his brilliance and his tenacious hard work. Whether the events actually happened or his name just got attached to a cyclical story, the BYU community gains from and is unified by its collective view of Hugh Nibley as an intellectual hero.



*Figure 8. Hugh plays the clown, ca. 1959.*<sup>213</sup>

### **Hugh Nibley as Nonconformist and Iconoclast**

Hugh Nibley is a leader, and he has defined what being a leader means to him: "Leaders are movers and shakers, original, inventive, unpredictable, imaginative, full of surprises that discomfit the enemy in war and the main office in peace."<sup>86</sup> And discomfit the office he does, with actions that some may even consider shocking. For, at the very least, Nibley is a first-class nonconformist, or

someone who refuses to act in accordance with established customs, attitudes, or ideas.

For example, there is a huge cycle of stories about Nibley's unconventional courtship of and engagement to his wife, the former Phyllis Draper. Some of these stories share common elements as the idea that Nibley, upon joining the BYU faculty in his mid-thirties (after completing several degrees, going on a mission, and serving in the military), was *strongly* encouraged, either by school officials, the commissioner of the Church Education System (CES), the General Authorities, or the Prophet himself, to marry quickly. Whether marrying would enable him to set a good example for young students or was for his own well-being depends on the story. But at any rate,

his ambitious scholarly work hardly left time for dating . . . , [so] not wanting to waste his time on girl-watching, he [knelt] down one day in the closed stacks of the old Grant Library and fervently laid out his faith, asking the Lord to please arrange that the next woman who came through the door would be a suitable wife for him. . . . The next woman who entered was his best student, considerably his junior. And so the courtship began, hardly breaking the stride of his scholarly endeavors.<sup>87</sup>

How totally nontraditional and how thoroughly appropriate for Hugh Nibley to find his wife in the library!

In some stories he went up into the hills of southern Utah to fast and pray for a wife.<sup>88</sup> In still other stories, after being told that if he didn't marry soon, he wouldn't be permitted to continue at BYU, he went in desperation "up Rock Canyon and sat on a rock overlooking the canyon, and he had been fasting, and he began to pray and asked the Lord to help him find a wife, and then as he was sitting, there his wife walked up the canyon, just taking a walk. He figured that must be the one, so he went down and introduced himself."<sup>89</sup>

Other stories have Phyllis Draper working in the ticket booth for theatrical events,<sup>90</sup> or as the secretary in the Joseph Smith Building,<sup>91</sup> or as the woman who gave him his key at Heritage Halls.<sup>92</sup> All of the stories have this in common: (1) Nibley was given a command and obeyed immediately, if not romantically—a clear





Figure 9. Phyllis and Hugh, 1966. “How totally nontraditional and how thoroughly appropriate for Hugh Nibley to find his wife in the library.”<sup>214</sup>

demonstration of Nibley’s faith in God or inspired leaders; and (2) Nibley does not do things in the usual way—he is a nonconformist.

This story about courtship bothers some people. People seemingly repeat it because it is so startlingly untraditional. To some, his courtship of Phyllis seems to threaten the traditional romance in courtship. To compound Nibley’s eccentric courtship, one story relates that just after he and Phyllis picked out her engagement ring, they ran into a colleague of Nibley. Hugh could not remember his fiancée’s name, so he simply introduced her as “XYZ.”<sup>93</sup>

According to Nibley, all these stories are not far from the truth, though he evades recounting the exact story. “I was thirty-six years old,” he says, “and told Elder Widtsoe, a member of the Latter-day Saint Council of the Twelve, that I would marry the first girl I met at BYU. Two weeks later, I was engaged to that first girl and in six weeks I was married. That’s why it’s called BYWoo, I guess.”<sup>94</sup>

Though his role as unconventional hero is strong, his role as iconoclast may be even stronger. Certainly his “breaker of idols and conventions” reputation does not end with his courtship stories. In

this sense he shares some qualities with the trickster of classic folklore. As popular folklorist Roger Abrahams explains,

In many groups there is a trickster hero who expends much of his energy in anti-social or anti-authoritarian activity. . . . He is a projection of desires generally thwarted by society. His celebrated deeds function as an approved steam-valve for the group; he is allowed to perform in this basically childish way so that the group may vicariously live his adventures without actually acting on his impulses.<sup>95</sup>

Nibley does not fit the trickster mold in every sense. In fact, many of the professors explained that his “childlike” behavior is often more correct, more adherent to a higher law, than even their own behavior. But because of social norms and a desire not to stand out, or because of reliance on material security and cultural acceptance, the professors do not have the courage to do the things that Nibley does. Through him they are afforded what Abrahams calls “wish fulfillment,”<sup>96</sup> vicariously thrilling to his escapades while still maintaining their safe haven of security. So through telling the stories, people can enjoy the excitement without suffering any consequences. Heroes do for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

It is important to remember that, as Michael Owen Jones asserts,

no culture [even BYU] is so rigid as to completely prohibit deviance from the accepted patterns . . . , for there is always in each group a discrepancy between the cultural ideal, expressed overtly in its rules and regulations, and the real as exhibited by the actual behavior of group members.<sup>97</sup>

Though Nibley may act atypically, no one at BYU expresses the slightest doubt as to his deep-seated faithfulness as a Christian and Latter-day Saint; he always acts in a way consistent with the spirit of the law.

As an iconoclast, or one who attacks cherished beliefs, Nibley does not tear down those doctrines at Mormonism’s center, while he grows impatient with zealous and spiritless pursuit of the letter of the law. Instead he attacks widely held cultural beliefs which are often shown to be hypocritical. A classic example of this is the story that Richard H. Cracroft tells about Nibley and his daughter

Martha. As Nibley's stake president, Cracroft learned of an incident that happened between Nibley and the local seminary teacher:

[The] seminary teacher, several weeks into the new year, came to Hugh's home and said, "We're very concerned that Martha has not been coming to seminary. She's registered for this course, and she hasn't shown up for the last several weeks." And Hugh said, "Well, I'm concerned too. I'm just terrified and shocked. I've told Martha not to take seminary courses. It is devastating to the spirit and to the testimony to take those kinds of courses. Now I've told her a dozen times to stay away from that kind of corrupting influence in the Church. I'm just shocked to know that she has gone ahead and signed up for courses like that. You bet. I'll talk with her."<sup>98</sup>

Cracroft said, "You can count on Hugh to come down on the opposite side of most any issue. And even in things so certain and so sacred as seminary, which everyone knows one must take—it is authorized by the Lord and the Brethren—even there Hugh puts his finger on the weakness of the seminary teachers." Often seminary teachers titillate with fringe topics to keep the students coming. But through telling this story Cracroft feels personal support for his own views and points out that Nibley "emphasized that for *him* the gospel is centered in the scriptures and not in the interpretations of men."<sup>99</sup> While others have told this same story with different details, the idea is the same. Many might *like* to be so outspoken, cutting straight to the heart of what is truly important. But, according to the stories circulating about him, few are as bold as Nibley.

Another reported event illustrating Nibley's boldness as an iconoclast occurred when he was being interviewed for a temple recommend. During the course of the interview, Cracroft asked Nibley if he would accept a calling on the high council:

[Nibley] said, "Oh, that would be fun. Provided that you don't just sit around and talk about problems and sit around and talk about things that could be improved and changed and provided that you [don't] sit and waste my time that I could be using elsewhere to talk about the government of the Church. I'm not interested in those kinds of things. That's just a waste of my time. If you don't do that, then I would be happy to be on the high council."<sup>100</sup>

Having grown up in the Church, Nibley undoubtedly knew what went on in high councils (as evidenced by the fact that he spelled out exactly what happens), and he was unafraid to express his opinions on the subject in a lighthearted way.

As Norton puts it, “He says things that nobody else is quite able or willing to say.”<sup>101</sup> Of course some think he goes too far. For instance, in the 1960s Margaret Pope (Bruce R. McConkie’s sister) asked Nibley to write a skit honoring President Ernest L. Wilkinson. When the script was completed, it strongly satirized Wilkinson. Pope considered the humor too caustic and didn’t want the skit to detract from the aura and dignity of the university or its president. She therefore asked Cracroft to help tone down the sarcasm a bit. Nibley and Cracroft worked together but still left it “pretty caustic. . . . [On the big evening,] Hugh Nibley was willing to get out and perform and be very, very funny and caustic. And we looked down in the first row—at President Wilkinson; he ate it up. He enjoyed the whole thing. It was fun to see the caustic wit of Hugh Nibley at work here.”<sup>102</sup>

Thirty years later, it is difficult to determine how people generally felt about President Wilkinson. But any person in a leadership position is likely to be the subject of satire, sarcasm, and mockery. Unafraid to be the person doing the mocking, Nibley had no worries about tenure or other repercussions. Not beholden to any outside forces besides his commitment to God, he has always enjoyed a certain freedom at BYU. Others enjoy the oblique freedom of living vicariously through his bold actions. In taking jabs at the university president it appears that he represented the majority of faculty and staff who admired and feared Wilkinson, who was, himself, a kind of eccentric trickster hero.

What professor would not occasionally prefer to get caught up on his or her personal reading during faculty meetings? According to a colleague, Nibley reportedly read *Reader’s Digest* there.<sup>103</sup> “He [would] often stand and make a comment, then sit down and keep reading. [No one] can do anything about it because Nibley is such a prominent person.”<sup>104</sup> Many of the professors expressed their feeling that Nibley is safe because he is so well respected. As Richard Holzapfel states about the famous “robes of the apostate priesthood” graduation prayer,

He has gotten to a position where he is so dedicated to the kingdom that the Brethren don't question him. And as a result, that gives him the freedom to say things that if I said it, I'd be excommunicated. It's kind of like there is nobody alive who can basically say exactly what he feels about how the Church operates. I think we tell the story [about the graduation prayer] because we wish we could do it. And here's our spokesman who can do it. So we use Nibley to do our own agenda but under the protection, under the umbrella, under the safety [of] "Well, Nibley said this." I'm not saying it's bogus that we're sitting up here giving Margaret Thatcher a degree. But look what Nibley says. He calls it as it is. It's really my feelings, but I'm using Nibley as my voice.<sup>105</sup>

As another professor puts it,

There aren't very many college professors at a university who have several members of the board of trustees so firmly in his corner that he can't be touched, and Nibley's enjoyed that. Even if he did get out of line, it's very difficult to bring him back. He has a tremendous latitude. He doesn't take advantage of it the way that some have or would if they had it, but I think that that has probably helped him to be iconoclastic. Everybody wants to be free of the rules and constraints, and Nibley succeeds.<sup>106</sup>

Nibley himself has said that he has never been "called on the carpet" for any of the things which he has said:

When I first came here [to BYU], I went up and asked the Brethren, "I'm blunt about many things. I lack self-control. I'm a silly, shallow, impulsive sort of person. If people start complaining, should I keep my nose clean and keep out of those things?" And the answer was, "That would be the worst thing you could do. We have to have someone to speak out." . . . I haven't been called down, I haven't been rebuked, and I wouldn't pay much attention if I were.<sup>107</sup>

Few others are in such a protected and fearless position. Thrilling at Nibley's iconoclastic deeds, professors enjoy repeating the stories of Nibley's feats without being threatened by personal risk. This is one of the reasons they gave for why Nibley is so appealing.



Figure 10. Phyllis Nibley, ca. 1980. “She knows when to leave me alone.”<sup>215</sup>

Nibley is able to get away with things others could not. Quite a few years ago there was a portrait display of professors’ wives on campus. Under each picture was a tribute to the wife written by the professor-husband. Nibley’s tribute was quite unusual: “She knows when to leave me alone.” Dan McKinley says his first reaction on reading this was, “Well, gee, that’s hardly romantic!” He goes on to explain:

There were all these neat things said by Steven Covey about his wife. But as I was talking to a good friend who was also a woman, she said that she was quite impressed by that, and as I thought about it, I [agreed]. He is a person who really needs to have privacy to get into his work. A friend of mine said that Nibley was asked one time, “If you could have the wish of your heart, what would it be?” His answer was, “To be invisible,” because people are constantly hounding him. He has an unlisted phone number, but if people find out his number and they’re watching one of his lectures on TV somewhere in Oregon, they’ll call him up and say, “What did you mean by that?!” Leave him alone so that he can do his work.<sup>108</sup>

While on first glance Nibley’s tribute to his wife, Phyllis, might catch many off guard, deeper reflection reveals the compliment he was paying her.

One of the main objects of Nibley's wit is the academic world. Among such Nibley stories about academia, the most repeated story is about the prayer he offered at commencement exercises in 1960: "We have met here today clothed in the black robes of a false priesthood."<sup>109</sup> This story is so popular that people have reported hearing it in California, on the East Coast, and even in Europe.<sup>110</sup> Nibley himself has supposedly said, "That was probably the best thing I've ever done because they've never asked me to pray again."<sup>111</sup> Nibley doesn't pull any punches when it comes to criticizing his profession with its addiction to tradition, pomp, and circumstance. This is actually one of the reasons that Norton gives for liking Nibley so much:

One of the reasons I like him, and this might sound a little perverse, is that he sees, vividly, all of the inherent weaknesses in the academic system. He pokes fun at the pretense, the dogmatism, that typically pervade a university atmosphere. And I had seen that since I had arrived here myself, [whispers] *I realized that most of us were phony*. So I get some kind of perverse satisfaction at seeing someone articulate that, I guess.<sup>112</sup>

Although folklorists do not normally examine the motivations of folk heroes, it is interesting to note the statements which Nibley has made himself regarding his famous prayer. When asked why he worded the prayer as he did, he responded, "I was feeling very strongly on that particular occasion that there was a lot of hypocrisy going on in those days. There was so much fakery, so much bluff going on."<sup>113</sup> His statement corresponds with the way in which many interpreted the prayer. But when asked if he enjoys "getting a rise when you say things like that," his response was poignant. "No, I don't enjoy getting a rise. I wanted to cry at the time."<sup>114</sup> Not all trickster heroes seek to possess such a role. But regardless of Nibley's intentions, those in his audience do get a rise out of him and interpret his actions according to their own needs.

As noted earlier, one of the reasons he is able to get away with such jabs is his willingness to risk the consequences. Besides his impeccable record with leaders of the Church, Nibley's lack of interest in any type of monetary reward affords him considerable freedom of speech. For instance, he is completely unworried about clothing styles. "Buying most of his clothes at Deseret Industries,



*Figure 11. Top: Plastic pin painted by a friend to represent Nibley's running shoes; Bottom: The shoes themselves. Hugh was "known to wear jogging shoes with his standard J.C. Penney-circa 1945 suits."<sup>216</sup>*

and known to wear jogging shoes with his standard J.C. Penney-circa 1945 suits, Hugh's first concern in dress has been practicality and not fashion."<sup>215</sup> The famous story about his ragged overcoat illustrates this well:

He was wearing this ragtag overcoat in the mission field, and the missionaries felt sorry for him. So some of the missionaries, maybe even the mission president, initiated a collection to buy him an overcoat. He, of course, came from a rather well-to-do family. He heard about [the collection,] and he went up to one of the missionaries and said, "You know, here's thirty dollars—buy him a suit too."<sup>216</sup>

This same story is told in a different context. Richard Holzapfel tells:

We had a fairly active high priest's quorum. Dallin Oaks, president of the university, was in the ward. The bishop [told me.] "He decided that we were going to raise some money to buy an older member of our ward a coat. He didn't have a nice warm coat. It was winter. So we got the high priest quorum to collect money to actually buy this person a coat. And Nibley came into my office, and he said, "Hey, I'll give you \$100 to help this guy." And I looked at him and said, "Hugh, that coat's for you."<sup>217</sup>



Whether this second story, or for that matter the first one, is true or not, the moral is the same: Nibley has no regard for his appearance and perhaps does not even care about his warmth. Yet he is the first one willing to stand up and help another whom he believes to be in need.

Hugh Nibley is completely unconcerned with wealth. As he has stated several times, including on his *Faith of an Observer* video, he only wants money which will be “sufficient for his needs.” As Gary Dayton believes, “He has purposely kept himself in a humble situation. He’s always lived in a very humble home. He dresses very plain.”<sup>118</sup> Some people mistakenly assume that when Nibley talks out about wealth he is merely complaining because he is a “poor professor.” But Nibley was a wealthy child. So he is certainly well acquainted with both sides of the coin.<sup>119</sup> With his immense knowledge and reputation, Nibley certainly could have taught at a more prestigious school than BYU, and he certainly could have chosen a profession which pays more than a professor can earn. But, as Robert Thomas has stated, he left behind “‘the glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome’ [for] the modesty that was Provo.”<sup>120</sup>

Because he has not sought after riches, Nibley and his family have often had to do without what some people would consider necessities. It is said that early in their marriage Phyllis had to go without buying dresses so that Hugh could buy books. One time in particular Nibley wanted a book on a German philosopher with special marginal notes. The book cost \$150, and that was in the 1960s.<sup>121</sup> Richard Holzapfel tells of the first time he opened the Nibleys’ refrigerator: “It was being held by a piece of wood, and it had nothing in it. [It was] an old, broken-down refrigerator with a piece of wood under there to hold it up.”<sup>122</sup>

Nibley similarly does not care about the condition of his house and yard. He has lived for many years in the same small, mid-city Provo house at the foot of the BYU bench. His unkempt lawn has become legendary, and there are stories ranging from neighbors taking up a petition to make him mow it to President Wilkinson begging him to take action—whereupon Nibley, of course, stakes a goat out on his front lawn to eat the grass.<sup>123</sup> John Welch also tells a story of the elders quorum showing up one Saturday to clean up his



Figure 12. *“If God had wanted it in a different state, he would have made the grass differently.”<sup>217</sup>*

yard as a service project. Instead of being grateful, Nibley forbade them to touch his lawn, saying that if God had wanted it in a different state, he would have made grass differently.<sup>124</sup>

Worldly success is unimportant to Nibley. For instance, if an editor refuses to publish an article as Nibley has submitted it, he will not let it be published at all. He has never gotten along well with editors. One particularly notorious account relates what took place between Nibley and an editor of the *Improvement Era*, the official (pre-*Ensign*) publication of the Church. Apparently Nibley’s footnotes had to be specially typeset. Because of the lengthy list of footnotes on an average Nibley article, setting type for his article ended up costing more than producing the rest of the magazine. When the editors told him they did not want his footnotes anymore, Nibley responded, “Well, a scholar is nothing without his footnotes. If that’s the way you want it, fine.” And he ended what he told Cracroft was “the longest-running and most unread series of articles in the history of the Church.”<sup>125</sup> He did not submit any more copy. Within a few months the general membership of the

Church realized that Nibley was no longer appearing in print, and they protested loudly. The *Era* soon started publishing him again—with complete footnotes.<sup>126</sup> Standing above the system, he felt no need to be published in the *Era*.

Another story which illustrates his nonreliance on publication arises from the pending publication of *Nibley on the Timely and the Timeless*. The original title, *The Nibley Legacy*, sent Nibley to the editor Truman Madsen, complaining that he did not like the title, that it sounded as if he were dead. He insisted that because he had not yet finished his work, those articles were not his “legacy.” Madsen pointed out that the title was already on the spine, on the running head of every page, and on the dust jacket. He said the only way they could change it would be to take the cost out of the royalties. Of course that is exactly what Nibley insisted on. Madsen asked, “Do you care that much about a title?” Nibley responded, “No, I care that little about royalties.”<sup>127</sup>

He is so above the system that he has never aspired to any positions of power. One professor relates: “One time I saw Nibley walking across campus with mismatched socks on, an ancient sports coat, and his signature crumpled hat. He looked at me with a sly grin and said, ‘They’ll never make me department chairman.’”<sup>128</sup>

Though he doubts its veracity, John Welch tells a story which is certainly true to the Hugh Nibley spirit. Welch says that one time they actually made Nibley chairman of the Religion Department. Nibley did not want to accept and even told the administrators that he would not have time to complete the responsibilities, but they insisted that everyone needed to take a turn in positions of leadership. After three months, people realized that no correspondence had been answered, and they discovered that Nibley had put all of the department mail unopened into a box on his desk. Soon thereafter Nibley was replaced as department chair.<sup>129</sup>

In a newspaper interview, Nibley said, “My secret is to lie low. And don’t get into administration, or you’ll never get anything done.”<sup>130</sup> While many academics covet such positions as department chair or dean, at the same time they admire Nibley for keeping his academic focus and for being unwilling to get caught up in the academic game.

This iconoclasm works because of the things Nibley is rebelling against. It is the negative, worldly, and secular things at which he pokes fun, all the while remaining respectful of the sacred things of the kingdom and of that which should be at the heart of academia—learning:

The Nibley stories are important because they confirm the existence of a man who is deeply principled, utterly incorruptible, childlike, and not beholden to any other. He is devoted to the gospel and no other principles. He doesn't care what people think about him. He doesn't care what other scholars say. He is single-minded and dedicated to the building up of the kingdom in his own unique, childlike way. Most of us are overly concerned about what other people think about us. You remember that statement in his video where he says, "We all know the university is neither more nor less than a place to show off." I think that is mainly why I encourage students to be their own scholars, to be deeply skeptical of what professors and others say, to always question what the texts say. Nibley is the classic iconoclast. He breaks up images. He doesn't accept armchair history or shallow archaeology. He does not accept as valid most of what goes on in the academic world. Nor should any of us.<sup>131</sup>

Nibley always manages to keep a spiritual perspective on things:

[Nibley] is open, he's honest, he's candid. And he's a gentle man. He doesn't openly attack people. He doesn't judge other people. So in a sense he is a model Saint, working in a discipline where the opposite qualities are typically celebrated. So he's just a refreshing contrast to what you'd typically get in the doctrinaire, dogmatic, unyielding, prideful exercise of the discipline, and he's exactly the opposite to all that. So in that sense he's a model scholar.<sup>132</sup>

Knowing what we know about Nibley—that he is brilliant, that he is faithful, that he is often absentminded—it seems a certitude that he would become a legend at BYU. And when one adds his principle-based iconoclasm to this threefold combination, his legendary status is assured. Nibley speaks his mind, as in the time in the mid-1960s when the Utah Symphony contributed the music for a devotional at BYU. Nibley arrived early and settled in with his

notes, in a foreign language, of course, and was talking and chuckling to himself about his finds. He listened intently to the music but, when the speaking began, returned to his notes. When President Earl C. Crockett announced that the lecture would be given by a colleague in the religion department, Nibley “stood straight up and said, ‘Oh for hell’s sake.’ Then he went straight back to his notes.”<sup>133</sup>

If he does not like something, he will say it. Librarian Gary Gillum’s wife and Phyllis Nibley both play in the Utah Valley Symphony. Gillum relates,

In a concert situation in the tabernacle, if he doesn’t like something, he’s not going to stand during the standing ovation like everybody else, and in some cases, I’ve even noticed that he doesn’t even applaud. A couple of times I’ve asked him how he liked such and such a concert, and he’s very frank about it. He says, “This was pretty lousy,” or “This was just wonderful.”<sup>134</sup>

A nonconformist, Nibley does not care what people think. “The grass on his lawn was always tall. He dressed like a custodian and rode an old rickety bicycle. I will never forget that slouchy old hat he always wore. Brother Nibley wasn’t snobbish, he was just unconcerned. He wore baggy old pants and a baggy sports coat.”<sup>135</sup> Recently his barber said he came in to get his hair cut and had only one suspender on his trousers. He had lost half of it but still considered them just as useful.<sup>136</sup>

Upon the occasion of turning eighty, Nibley mused about the benefits of getting older. He said that at that age, “You’re not under any particular obligation, you can speak the truth, and you have no career interests whatsoever. It’s a marvelous thing.”<sup>137</sup> Hugh Nibley is a nonconformist and iconoclast who does things only if they seem right to him, not caring whether they seem right to the rest of the world.

### Hugh Nibley as Eccentric

Nibley’s unquestionable brilliance is but one reason that he stands out among his colleagues at BYU. There are, of course, numerous smart people at universities. It is something else about Nibley, a certain eccentricity, that makes him such a folk hero. Folklorist Michael Owen Jones points out that a hero is often an “eccentric



*Figure 13. Hugh Nibley as the Great Hadji Baba, the Carbuncle on the Brow of Wisdom, during a humorous skit entitled "Shalamar," presented at a Brigham Young University Women's Program, April 24, 1970.<sup>218</sup>*

character, or the dynamic individual with unusual personality traits."<sup>138</sup> Unquestionably, Nibley is an eccentric.

One way in which Nibley deviates from established forms is in his lecture style. One student describes:

When you looked out the door [of the classroom] you could see his office. The bell would ring for class to begin, and his office door would open. Brother Nibley would come down the hall and four or five steps before he reached the classroom he would start to lecture. For a whole hour he [talked] at a locomotive speed. The minute the bell rang, he would shut his books, walk out, and go back to his office.<sup>139</sup>

Another student emphasized how, at the closing bell, Nibley would immediately stop talking, even if he was in mid-sentence.<sup>140</sup> And because he spoke so fast that it was impossible to take notes, a student's only hope is to tape-record the lecture. Unfortunately, Nibley did not tend to be too mindful of the tape recorders littering his desk. Back when all tape recorders had to be plugged in, Nibley accidentally tripped over one of the cords. While he was unhurt, the tape recorder smashed to the floor in pieces. Nibley never paused in his lecture.<sup>141</sup>

Students also must be prepared for Nibley to slip in and out of all kinds of languages.<sup>142</sup> And he seldom followed a syllabus. Nibley basically lectures on whatever he happens to be studying at the time. Gary Gillum states:

When I took his class, he'd come out of his office, and he'd basically continue on what he was doing his research on. He wouldn't follow much of a syllabus. But that was an exciting thing. You were learning how his mind operated. And you caught his enthusiasm. Sometimes that is more important than following a syllabus. I would rather that students be excited about the Book of Mormon and learn some tools for how to study it.<sup>143</sup>

Richard Holzapfel had the interesting experience of taking a class from Nibley at the same time he was attending Nibley's Gospel Doctrine class in his ward. Reportedly, of the three hundred people in the ward, over three hundred people came to Nibley's class.<sup>144</sup> The extra number accounted for were visitors, often referred to as "Niblets," who came from all over the state to learn from Nibley. Holzapfel discovered that between each week of class there were startling gaps in the material covered.

What we discovered [was] he continued discussion from class during the week in Gospel Doctrine. Then when he came to class on Monday, he picked up from Gospel Doctrine. So all of a sudden we went through this spring term, and we realized Nibley had been talking all week, and he just kept talking. It didn't matter where he was. He just kept talking [about] the same thing. I think it happened to be the Book of Mormon that year. But we figured out that's what was going on. So now being in his [Gospel Doctrine] class, [suddenly] it all made sense. He had this stream of consciousness that went the whole semester. It was really bizarre. When I had other people around tell me, "Sometimes I just get lost!" I told them, "Don't worry. You have to go to Sunday School class to catch the break in the middle."<sup>145</sup>

Another story which echoes this same phenomenon is told by Eugene England. When Hugh Nibley was invited to give a lecture for the Know Your Religion series, England was chatting with Nibley before the lecture.

It came time for him to start, and I noticed that he had two long [shoe]boxes full of cards down at his side. And when it came time for him to begin his lecture, he simply reached down without looking (as far as I could tell), took out a huge stack of cards, walked up to the front, and began speaking from the top card.<sup>146</sup>

England goes on to say that the lecture was “all in other languages and esoteric stuff. The amusing thing was to look around me, and here were wonderful old ladies in blue hair and tennis shoes and all the stereotypes, and they were scribbling notes like mad. They probably didn’t understand a word he was saying, but they knew it was all wonderful because it was proving the Church is true.”<sup>147</sup>

When Nibley lectures, whether at school or at church or at a conference, he becomes so engrossed in what he is saying that he really doesn’t pay attention to his audience:

He really doesn’t care what people out there are thinking or whether they’re following him. Some people complain that he mutters a little bit or that he is hard to follow. He never makes an effort to coax the audience along, to stop and repeat himself, to summarize, to say, “Here’s what I’m trying to tell you. Am I communicating to you?” That’s not Nibley’s style. He just talks. And it’s up to you to get out of it whatever you’re able to get. I’m not sure who his audience is. That’s so different than our normal ideas about communication. For him it is a matter of integrity and personal sincerity. He will say what he is going to say. And he doesn’t allow the audience to set his agenda or to manipulate his approach. He’s going to be himself no matter what.<sup>148</sup>

Still, Nibley has won many awards such as Teacher of the Year. Victor Ludlow recalls that once when he had been so honored, he went up to receive the plaque and said, “Teacher of the Year! I’m lucky if I have more than twelve students in my class at the end of the semester!”<sup>149</sup> Ludlow believes the statement to be true; Nibley is notorious for those low numbers:

You go by his classroom the first day of the semester, and it is packed with students sitting on the floor and standing in the aisles. And the doors [are] open, and people [are] standing



out in the hallway because everybody wants to take his class. But by the end of the semester he's lucky if there are students past the first two rows. They just can't keep up with him. His vocabulary, [for instance], you've got to have an excellent background in ancient Near Eastern history, and it helps if you know a few languages, and he also uses literary connections. You have to be a very well-educated person to keep up with him. Otherwise he tosses out references, names, and terms that just mean nothing to you. After a week or two of this you say, "Hey, I [thought] it would be impressive to sit at his feet, but I'm in a constant cloud and a daze." There were very few students that would actually stick with him.<sup>150</sup>

Apparently Nibley thought it was humorous that he be recognized as Teacher of the Year, implying, "How can you be a great teacher if you can't keep the students there and satisfy their learning demands?" But being Hugh Nibley, he offers a learning opportunity which students would not be able to receive in any normal class.

In the world of academia, once someone is labeled as an eccentric professor, "to such persons are attached many of the current stories which seem to characterize them. The stories told" of Nibley "are the group attached to the beloved and impractical, nearsighted and absent-minded scholar" everywhere.<sup>151</sup>

There is a story that dates back to 1797 of a scholar forgetting where he hired a horse and carriage and subsequently driving the streets asking passersby if they knew who owned them.<sup>152</sup> The same story, with a different context, of course, is applied to Nibley. He drives to the store and then walks home. When his wife questions him about it, he has no idea where the car is.<sup>153</sup> An interesting twist on this story was told to me by Nibley's barber Gary Dayton. He says that about thirty years ago, when he used to cut all of the Nibley boys' hair, they would tell him that sometimes on early Sunday mornings they would have to get together as a family and spread out all over campus to search for their father's car, hoping to spot it when there were very few cars on campus.<sup>154</sup>

Another cycle of absentminded professor stories centers in the eccentric forgetting about lunch. Many of the stories told at MIT about Norbert Wiener, the coiner of the word *cybernetics*, are nearly identical to those told about Nibley. Wiener is walking down

the hall when a student starts badgering him with questions. When he is done answering, he asks which direction he was facing when the student stopped him. When the student tells him, he responds by saying, “Oh fine. Then I had lunch.”<sup>155</sup> In the Nibley version he is walking along the sidewalk looking perplexed. When the student asks him what is wrong, he replies that he can’t remember whether he has eaten lunch yet or not.<sup>156</sup>

In addition to being forgetful, both professors are eccentric in other ways, too. “Wiener had this nasty habit, besides wandering into the wrong classroom and scrawling these silly equations on the board, of solving them in his head, which is . . . not only difficult, but noninformative for students.”<sup>157</sup> BYU Professor Ray Gleave describes a similar experience in taking a class from Nibley. He says,

I remember that he had a big, thick Greek book. He would start reading it the minute he came to the door. He would read it in Greek and sometimes translate in[to] English. . . . He would go as fast as he could. Every once in a while he would start chuckling and say, “This is really choice. Too bad you students can’t read Greek.”<sup>158</sup>

Nibley’s religion students aren’t the only ones who have difficulty following his trail. He seems to be infamous for what some label his “flawed methodology”<sup>159</sup>—his sloppy footnotes.<sup>160</sup> As Richard Holzapfel of the religion faculty puts it, “Nibley is a million times smarter than I’ll ever be. I couldn’t even dialogue with the gentleman. He is beyond me. But if you use his stuff, you have to go check it—like you would with any other scholar.”<sup>161</sup> Stephen Robinson, another member of the religion faculty, says, “I have tremendous respect for Nibley. He is ahead of all the rest of us in terms of his intellect—one of the few true geniuses that I have met. He’s just not that concerned with scholarly methodology.”<sup>162</sup> Often Nibley uses obscure sources in his books and articles. For instance, when he was in Europe during World War II, he scoured every bookstore he came upon. He still owns most of the books he bought there. Sometimes the only copy that his source checkers can find is in Nibley’s garage.<sup>163</sup>

Robinson, who worked as his assistant, tells an illuminating story about Nibley’s research habits. He says,

It was my job to follow after him and double-check his footnotes on all the stuff he was writing. At that point he was writing *Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment*. Footnotes for that are all over the map. We would occasionally find one that was messed up, and so it wasn't unheard of for him to make a mistake. He did it all the time. And I tracked one particular reference down. He cited a page number in a certain book, and I went there. I got the book and turned to the page number. It was obviously an error because it was in the plates section. It was just photographs and things like that. There was no text. So I went to see him at the end of the day and said, "We have a broken reference here."

He looked at it and said, "No, no, I'm sure that's right."

"I've got the book right here." I opened it, showed him. I said, "There's no text on the page. It's just photographs."

He looked at it a second, and then he said, "Yeah, here it is, right here." And he points to a photograph of a wall of a tomb, and he's reading the text off the photograph of the tomb wall. Well, what kind of a footnote is that? I mean, Nibley gets criticized by people who don't know the languages and can't follow the research, and I thought that that would exacerbate things, but he didn't care. He said, "No. As long as it's there, I don't care. I don't care if they can read it."<sup>164</sup>

Well documented, this "I don't care" attitude conveniently fits the eccentric-professor mold. As some faculty members have put it, his mind is on higher things and cannot be bogged down with the mundane; they label him as an impractical genius. As Tristram Coffin says, "Americans show a certain uneasy respect for Einsteins and Norbert Wieners, but since they are not quite sure what these



Figure 14. "Often Nibley uses obscure sources in his books and articles."<sup>219</sup>

geniuses are up to, they tell stories about their ineptitude in everyday matters.”<sup>165</sup>

This is not to imply that people concoct the idea that Nibley is sloppy with footnotes and documentation, nor to suggest that documentation is unimportant. With almost all folklore there has to be a spark of truth to get the stories started. But of note is that, first, being meticulous with footnotes appears not to be a priority for Nibley. As Gary Gillum put it, “Footnotes he is pretty bad at. But that’s because he feels he has to do it to make certain people happy. It’s not making him happy. He’s got such a strong testimony of the gospel that he doesn’t need to convince people with footnotes. He can do it with his own words.”<sup>166</sup> Secondly, professors seem to enjoy these sloppy footnote stories. In Coffin’s words, “Curiously, these stories are often relished by other scholars, who seem to share the common desire to see their betters exhibit human frailty.”<sup>167</sup>

Though he may not be as concerned about his footnotes as some academics, there are at least some stories about his emphasis on them. Once he left a message for the editor of the magazine he was working for which said that he would not be in to work the next day—Nibley had driven off to California to check a footnote for an article.<sup>168</sup> It seems safe to say that Nibley cares about scholastic conventions, only he cares in a different way than most professors. He sees such conventions not as an end in themselves but as useful only when they serve a purpose.

Although some might see it as a big stretch to include footnote practices under the eccentric-professor umbrella, it is certainly no stretch to include Nibley’s eccentric appearance. Gary Gillum, compiler of *Of All Things! A Nibley Quote Book*, calls it “the Einstein syndrome. Einstein hardly ever matched his socks. That wasn’t important to him. And Nibley, he’ll wear tennis shoes from K-Mart with a black suit and his fishing hat. He just wears clothes to cover his body. He’s not worried about fashion or that kind of thing.”<sup>169</sup>

There are many funny stories about Nibley and his clothes. It is well known that he often wears mismatched socks:<sup>170</sup>

Dr. Nibley is likely to show up to class with a suit coat that belongs to the suit pants he didn’t wear, mismatched socks, and a tie that doesn’t come close to matching his shirt. Often he will wear the same thing over and over for weeks, or he will

consistently wear ragged appearing clothing. None of this is because he can't afford to buy good clothing; he just doesn't think about it.<sup>171</sup>

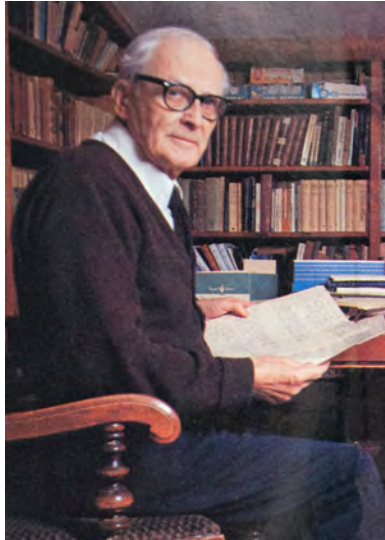
Susan Rasmussen relates that "one of the faculty members was purring about what a good deal he had gotten on a suit he had bought on sale. Nibley was walking by and said, 'See mine? Got it free—in my neighbor's trash can.'"<sup>172</sup> Nibley often brags about getting all of his clothing from friends, declaring that there are better uses for money than to buy clothes with it.<sup>173</sup> Because he is focused on more crucial things, sometimes Nibley will show up for class wearing slippers, and he often comes with pieces of toilet paper stuck to his face covering where he cut himself while shaving.<sup>174</sup>

His reputation gets pushed to the extreme in the story that because Nibley dresses in such a ragamuffin fashion, one time when his car broke down in California he was arrested for vagrancy when he was trying to hitchhike to a gas station. Dressed as shabbily as he was, the police had a difficult time believing that he was actually a college professor.<sup>175</sup> Nibley has more important things than fashion on his mind.

In fact, Nibley has so many important things on his mind that, some stories stress, he often ignores what apparently seem to him everyday annoyances. This single-minded attention to his brain is another reason he is labeled "eccentric." "A neighbor recalls that when people came to the Nibley door in California, young Hugh (just a teenager) would open the door, admit the visitor to the house, and close the door, all the while never lifting his eyes from the book he was reading. For all he knew, he could be letting in a burglar."<sup>176</sup>

Another story which illustrates his habit of being so deeply engrossed in thought that the world goes on unnoticed around him is one recounted earlier where Nibley, working in his carrel in the library late one night and asked by a janitor to help fix a leaky pipe, soon had the flashlight focused on his book so that he could continue to study.<sup>177</sup> Another time Nibley did not evacuate his office when there was a flood in the building. As the janitor was investigating, "he found Nibley perched on top of his desk with his research papers piled around him completely ignoring the stream of water running through his office."<sup>178</sup>

Stories such as these eccentric-professor tales are delightful to tell and to hear; they are “water cooler” anecdotes, which tend to be repeated often because they are so funny, entertaining, and leveling.



*Figure 15. A Latter-day Saint spiritual guide.<sup>220</sup>*

### **Hugh Nibley as Latter-day Saint Spiritual Guide**

At Brigham Young University, where 93 percent of the student body and faculty are Latter-day Saints, and when the university’s stated purposes are an unabashed fusion of the intellectual and the spiritual, the definition of “important things” no doubt differs decidedly from the definition prevalent at MIT, Yale, Harvard, or even Notre Dame. In this respect, BYU is unique. Hugh Nibley is unique, also, among eccentric professors because he is respected not only for his intellect but also for his spirituality. Nibley clearly fits a criterion Michael Owen Jones says is necessary for one to become a hero to a group of people: “The individual must be recognized by others as a potential hero, and eventually he must be conceived of as epitomizing specific values of great significance to certain individuals in particular circumstances.”<sup>179</sup> It follows that his fellow Saints would admire him at BYU, a religious university, since he represents and embodies values that Latter-day Saints share.

There is a story about Nibley visiting his son Charles when he lived in San Francisco. Nibley had paced the floors all night, not sleeping at all. In the morning his son asked him if he was ill. Nibley responded, "No, there's just so much evil in this city I couldn't rest."<sup>180</sup> In fact, Nibley is keenly attuned to matters of the spirit. At the same time, he represents values shared by academics. Latter-day Saints believe that "the glory of God is intelligence, or, in other words, light and truth" (Doctrine and Covenants 93:36). As an academic and a Latter-day Saint, Nibley excels not only in matters of intelligence but in matters of faith.

Nibley is a notorious temple-goer. Every Thursday he trudges up the hill with his little suitcase. Prior to entering the temple for the first time, many Latter-day Saints study Nibley's writings about the temple. His influence is considerable. For example, because of his writings, I feel as if I first went to the temple knowing more than many who had been attending their whole lives. So great was his impact on my temple-going experience that one day, when I was a newlywed, I waited on a bench outside the temple until I saw him coming, so that I could attend a session at the same time as he did. Knowing all of the stories, especially that he says he learns something new every time he goes through the temple, I felt there would be something magical about being in the temple rooms with him. To me, and many other Latter-day Saints, he has become an icon of spiritual knowledge and righteousness. I wanted to share his temple-going experience. My experience is replicated in the lives of thousands who admire his unique fusion of intellectual and spiritual.

Hugh Nibley has taught so many people so much about the temple, and about other spiritual issues, that many Latter-day Saints have come to see him as a possessor of hidden riches of the kingdom. Latter-day Saints believe that he has access to unrevealed information because he is transcendently faithful and because he has made the effort, by study and faith, to find things out and make connections. For example, Boyd Nielsen tells of Nibley speaking at an Education Week in California. He was discoursing on the Creation, using ancient records to elucidate the scriptures. "He came to a point and stopped, saying, 'Brothers and sisters, I wish we were in the temple so I could continue reading this.'"<sup>181</sup> Nielsen's

interest was so captured that he was determined to find out what Nibley knew but wasn't saying. After the lecture, he went up to the podium to talk with Nibley and asked if he might be able to look at Nibley's manuscript. Nibley obliged, but Nielsen found the manuscript was in Coptic picture writing.

Another story illustrates the widespread belief that Nibley has access to information which has not been generally revealed. It is told that Nibley was not at all surprised when the Joseph Smith Papyri were discovered in the basement of a museum in Chicago. "He wasn't surprised because he knew where they had been all along. Furthermore, he was not impressed by their discovery because he knows, and has known, where all of the lost manuscripts are."<sup>182</sup>

Nibley's spirituality is also demonstrated by his personal ministry with others and by his success as a missionary. He taught the gospel to and baptized a famous basketball star, Krešimir Ćosić, who had been recruited from the Yugoslavian Olympic team to play

basketball at BYU. When he first came to BYU, the young man, a communist and an atheist, spoke no English. When Krešimir's roommate Zee Mincek became engaged to Hugh Nibley's daughter, the two Yugoslavian roommates began taking the discussions. Apparently during the very first discussion, Krešimir was touched by the Spirit and decided he wanted to get baptized, but Nibley finished teaching him all of the discussions before he baptized him.

On the day that Krešimir was baptized in the Salt Lake Tabernacle, he and Nibley went



Figure 16. Krešimir Ćosić playing with Martha and Zina, ca. 1980.<sup>221</sup>

in to get their white clothing. The women behind the counter were in shock, stunned because the day before the supervisor had advised them to complete their inventory with clothing for very tall



individuals. When Nibley was asked if he believed that the supervisor had been inspired or if it had just been luck, he replied, "You decide."<sup>183</sup>

Krešimir went on to become a very strong member of the Church and would hold many positions of authority in Yugoslavia. In the summer of 1995, while Krešimir was dying in Bethesda Hospital in Maryland, Nibley flew out to see him the day before he died. An amazing missionary when the gospel is the common element between them, Nibley has the ability to mingle not only with the intellectual but also with the athlete.<sup>184</sup>

Nibley's faith in the Latter-day Saint religion is so unwavering that many have labeled him as a defender of the faith. However, opinion is divided as to whether this is a good thing. Some consider him an apologist, who already knows where he wants to get before he begins and is so eager to get his bridge built that he "sometimes incorporates a rotten timber here or there."<sup>185</sup> Any scholar who knows conclusions before investigation is necessarily an apologist and a scholastic. In fact, most Latter-day Saints are purposeful in knowing their spiritual destination and that the gospel is true. "These revelations are correct, and so [we] start building a bridge to get there, discarding evidence that would lead somewhere else and incorporating all the evidence that goes in the direction that we want."<sup>186</sup>

Richard Holzapfel tells a story about how Nibley may have reached his pinnacle of faith in the gospel. He says there was a period in Nibley's life when he had doubts (stories from other sources echo this), but he underwent some experiences where he became "otherworldly"; then there was no further doubt. Holzapfel says that when Nibley was young, he used to

refer to himself as an atheist, but maybe just agnostic. Elder Cowley was speaking in Glendale. As he was speaking, he stopped. He looked down at Hugh and said, "You have a question. I don't know what the question is; I just know that you are going to get an answer." And that was an early experience of Nibley's where he felt like God knew him and was concerned. As a series of things happened to him, his worldview changed to where God is God and Joseph Smith is a real prophet and those issues aren't debatable for him anymore. So in one sense

he starts off knowing that it's true; so, the thing is, how can he present it the best way he can? That isn't to say that he's closed-minded because he is critical of certain things about our church and about things we believe and about how we act; he's willing to do that. But on a certain level, about whether the Church is true or [whether] the gospel is really restored, the issue is closed. He knows. His job now is to figure out how to prove it.<sup>187</sup>

It's a little like a scientist who has discovered an end result and now needs to figure out how to get from step A to Z. The experiment in a certain sense is already over. The search is for the best way to explain it.

Because of his unique combination of skills, values, and beliefs, Nibley has become an influential figure at BYU and throughout the Church. He fills a room with his presence. Even outsiders to BYU, perhaps especially outsiders to BYU, can identify this aura. Professor Sam Rushforth of the Botany Department tells about the Clean Air Symposium held at BYU in the mid-1980s. Rushforth was hosting several Environmental Protection Agency officials:

When Hugh Nibley was speaking, I was standing at the south windows with those guys. We were having a conversation, and then Nibley started talking. They looked at the audience responses, and then they looked at this guy, and they kept saying to me, "Who is this guy?! Who is this Nibley guy?! What in the world is going on here?!" It was a kick for me not only to see the audience response to Nibley but that they caught on that he was somebody special and that they could see that interaction. They were very, very interested in the whole sequence of events that they saw unfolding.<sup>188</sup>

Because Nibley is so well respected at BYU and because so many people believe that he is more knowledgeable than the rest of us, especially on religious matters, he is looked to as a prophet of sorts. Richard Holzapfel tells of being an undergraduate and taking a religion class from Nibley. The class, in the old Joseph Smith Building, had high windows which let in lots of sun. Nibley had been lecturing on the last days and the signs of the times:

It was just one of those days when the sun was coming in the room just right so he kind of looked like a prophet. We were young and enthusiastic, and here was our prophet speaking to us. All of a sudden he stopped, and he walked over to the window, and he gazed out. Realistically it was just a minute or two, but it felt like an hour. He didn't say anything; he just gazed out the window. Then he turned around to us, and he said, "It's too late." And that was it. The class was over. He left. So we're all like, "No! What! The Second Coming's tomorrow?!" We all walked out with this really weird feeling; it was eerie, and wow! Nibley was this prophet.<sup>189</sup>

Holzapfel still does not know what happened that day. Nibley could have been saying it was too late to turn his taxes in. But Holzapfel uses the word *eerie* to describe the event, going on to explain that there was something otherworldly about Nibley, whom he considers a transcendent person who walks around BYU campus in a different world and who, on the basis of his intellect and faith, has the power to act as a prophet.

Hugh Nibley has become a mythic figure at BYU. He embodies what William A. Wilson calls the "value center" of BYU. Stephen Robinson states:

He embodies for us certain virtues, and any story that is designed to illustrate those virtues gravitates to Nibley. Any evaluation that would go the opposite direction is immediately rooted out by that emotional part of us that wants him to be the font of academic and intellectual virtue. That is the mechanism. And he's passed over into the mythic so that I'm sure the stories about him will continue and grow and get better and better—because of the emotional need it satisfies for the community of BYU—trying to make an uneasy marriage between the things of the Spirit and the things of the world. Learning of the Spirit and learning of the world. He becomes our champion.<sup>190</sup>

Some of the most interesting stories I have gathered on Nibley haven't been about his intelligence or eccentricity at all. These stories are about Nibley standing perfectly still in the middle of the flow of things, as if he were on a different plane. Back in 1969, Darwin Hayes said:

The first time I saw him I thought he was a custodian. The second time I saw him he was walking down the stairs to the pond, reading a book. I thought he was going to fall, but he didn't seem concerned. The third time was in the Grant Library. He was reading a book, and every once in a while he would stop and look off into space. Then after a few minutes he would give a big smile and jot down some notes.<sup>191</sup>

Richard L. Anderson tells of waiting in his car at the bottom of the south steps of the old Joseph Smith Building. He noticed Nibley start down the steps reading a book. "He'd take a step and read a little and take a step and read a little. When he reached the lower groups of steps it took him nine-and-a-half minutes to come down that last tier of steps, taking a step and reading his book."<sup>192</sup>

Richard Holzapfel tells of his coming up to campus one morning and noticing Nibley off in the bushes picking berries:

I came up on campus and there he was. I had gotten to know him by this time, so I was unafraid. I went up and asked him, "What's going on? What are you up to?" He was staring up past the temple. He says, "Oh, look up there. Look at Rock Canyon. Look at that wall right there. See that?" I looked up there. "Oh yeah, yeah. I kind of see that." He goes, "I've never noticed that before." He just was staring. He'd been up there harvesting, then all of a sudden he was standing up there looking at this thing. And I thought, How many times has he gone up this hill, and yet it was like a new thing for him? I remember that day, how students were busily coming up on campus, with bikes and walking. And he was totally oblivious to everyone coming by. He was just doing his deal. It's really otherworldly.<sup>193</sup>



Figure 17. Hugh training Paul to be an observer, ca. 1947.<sup>222</sup>

One of the roles which Nibley plays for the people at BYU is that of spiritual guide. He is a prototype of how the spiritual and intellectual can join within one person to embody Latter-day Saint ideals and goals.



Figure 18. Two of Nibley's trusty typewriters.<sup>223</sup>

### Hugh Nibley as Humble but Vigorous Defender of the Faith

Nibley's single-minded concentration in the field of academic pursuits is one of the principle traits of his which make him a model scholar. That passion, coupled with his eccentric persona, has elevated him to legendary status. Nibley may be brilliant, eccentric, outspoken, and different, but he is certainly not Other, for underlying all that he does and says is a deep and unwavering commitment to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Never suspect, Nibley is unquestionably a member of the Latter-day Saint community—one of the necessary elements of being a model Latter-day Saint scholar. The other is the fact that his eccentricity enables him to look at things in a new, innovative, and influential way. He thereby propels the community of Saints into new areas of scholarship while remaining true to their value center.

None of the professors I interviewed expressed even the slightest doubt as to Nibley's faithfulness. On the contrary, most stressed his church devotion as one of his strongest and most admirable attributes. Don Norton says,

He's an eccentric man. He is also gifted. I think that is the main reason that you can tell stories about Hugh and can tolerate his eccentricities. In his old age he is becoming kind of outspoken and so on, but in an unqualified way he is committed to the gospel. There is no question where he stands or where his commitment is, so he is easy to forgive for all his eccentricities. He has no reservations at all; he doesn't make excuses. He is rock solid.<sup>194</sup>

Many of the other professors, through their stories, conveyed a similar picture of Nibley. He may be acting in an unconventional way, for instance, in forbidding his daughter to attend seminary,<sup>195</sup> but the motivation for his action is believed to be an awareness of and adherence to a higher law.

Nibley's being attuned to this higher law gives him a certain consistency. Unaffected by the siren call of worldly fame, he is steadfast and unmoving. Gary Hatch pointed out that perhaps there had been a mighty change for Nibley somewhere along the line. Early in his career he seemed to focus more on worldly scholarship, but there came a point when he turned his attention almost completely to Latter-day Saint scholarship (such as his studies of the Book of Mormon).

Hatch reports that some people have accused Nibley of being an apologist, that instead of a true intellect with an open mind looking for any answer, he is looking for what he has preconceived—this is scholasticism, or defending the faith in order to leave religion pure or intact. One doesn't have to look far to find books in which Nibley defends the Latter-day Saint religion. For instance, one of the prime objectives of *Myth Makers*, *Sounding Brass*, and *Since Cumorah* is to directly respond to anti-Mormon criticism. The most famous of Nibley's "defender of the faith" articles is his *No, Ma'am, That's Not History*, a direct response to Fawn Brodie's *No Man Knows My History* in which she discredited Joseph Smith. Some professors have pointed out that Nibley is asked to do this defending by the leaders of the Church. Apparently Nibley prefers not to defend his beliefs to others, that in some way he considers it a waste of time, but that Nibley believes it fulfills a duty to illustrate to outsiders what Latter-day Saints believe and why.

Countering the argument that Nibley's preconceived expectations are negative is the opinion many professors expressed—that he already knows what he wants to find simply because he has researched every possibility and has studied every side until he has found the whole truth—the Latter-day Saint religion—and everything does fall in line with that. As one professor puts it,

Nibley said, "When I found that I could get anything published anywhere, I was no longer interested in publishing." So I think he had just decided to test his capacity as a scholar. I don't think there was any change. I think he just said, "Well, now that I know I can play the world's game, I'm going to dedicate myself to the building up of the kingdom." I don't think there was any evolution of commitment or reorientation of thinking—that's too typical of skeptics in the Church. [laughs] Well, Nibley never makes mistakes like that. He just realized there was a lot of shoddy scholarship in the Church: among critics of the Church, archaeologists in the Church, historians in the Church, theologians in the Church; and he exposed them all—simply by doing better scholarship.<sup>196</sup>

Another possible explanation for this shift in emphasis is that Nibley reportedly had a near-death experience at approximately the same time as his academic shift. But none of the professors mentioned this as a motivating possibility. Clearly, these stories are not ultimately about Hugh Nibley; they reveal insights into the people who tell the stories and claim them for their own.

One of the characteristics that the professors found most charming about Nibley is his childlike humility amidst his phenomenal accomplishments. Having edited three volumes of Nibley's complete works, Don Norton has had firsthand experience in interacting with Nibley and believes that Nibley underestimates his contribution. He tells the story of a publication party with Nibley and his wife after one of the volumes came off the press. Nibley appeared honored that the volumes had ever "seen the light of day." Nibley said to him on another occasion, "You know, I was reading through some of that old stuff I used to write. There's some pretty good stuff there." With all of his knowledge and with his huge printed legacy, he remains humble and kind. "He's still very childlike in his eagerness

to learn and his acknowledgment that anybody and everybody is in a position to teach him.”<sup>197</sup>

The barbers in the BYU barbershop often have doctrinal questions to ask Nibley when he comes in for his haircut. “He will explain it to you in a kindly way, but then he will say, ‘But what do I know about it?’”<sup>198</sup> Nibley so underestimates his contribution that he labels his lifelong pursuit of knowledge as merely “dabbling.”<sup>199</sup> Although he has authored dozens of articles and books, he remains humble about his academic contribution. He goes so far as to say he does not feel he has done anything yet for which he will be remembered. Yet at the same time many in the BYU community have expressed the opinion that no one can do any truly original Latter-day Saint work because Nibley has already done it and filed it away.<sup>200</sup> Yet Nibley says, “I do hope to do something I can be remembered for.”<sup>201</sup>

Gary Dayton tells that Nibley believes he was meant to finish the book he was working on when he passed away, having received the definite impression that the Lord would preserve his life until the book is completed. He had been working on it a long time, but said he intended to work on it a lot longer. “If I don’t finish it for a long time, I’m going to live a long time.”<sup>202</sup> What impressed Dayton most in this anecdote is at once Nibley’s extreme faith and his keen sense of humor.

It is interesting to note that when asked what he would do were he twenty-two again, Nibley did not say he would study more—in fact, he insists he would spend a lot less time studying Arabic. He didn’t say he would try to pursue a more lucrative field than academia, nor did he say that he would do everything exactly the same as he has done. Instead, he said that he would “pray like heck. If I were young, I’d seek the advice of the Lord in all I do.”<sup>203</sup>

Though Hugh Nibley may be the most innovative and capacious scholar in BYU history, he may well be remembered more for his eccentricities. And even more than for his manifold peculiarities, Nibley will likely be remembered for his spirituality, to whose heroic proportions all might do well to aspire.



### Hugh Nibley as BYU Icon

Hugh Nibley is a figure which the BYU community has latched on to for over five decades as an individual who represents the university's divine and unique purpose. Bruce C. Hafen, former BYU provost and now a Latter-day Saint General Authority, captured well, in his 1995 university conference address, the essence of Nibley that faculty, staff, and students have always found so appealing:

As I left the statisticians to go to my office that morning, I saw Hugh Nibley walking toward me near the ASB parking lot. Suddenly he stopped walking, turned around, and began looking intently northward. The inimitable Nibley removed his sunglasses, tipped back his canvas hat, and stood transfixed, as though his eyes drank in a vision. Then I saw what had stopped him—and an aesthetic and spiritual view of BYU replaced the statistical one. A clearing storm and rising sun had left a ring of heavy, low clouds around the neck of Mt. Timpanogas, like a richly flowered lei. The familiar Timp skyline poked above the clouds, glistening in the sunlight with a light layer of fresh snow, the white peaks contrasting brilliantly with the blue sky and the full green foreground. I stopped too, looking not just at Timp but at Hugh Nibley looking at Timp. No matter how many hundreds of times he had seen that mountain, no matter how full his head from his latest reading and his always brimming stream-of-consciousness, Hugh looked up longingly at Timp. He didn't take it for granted. For Nibley, Timp is like a wonderful poem or painting or scripture or trip to the temple—always revealing new meaning and new inspiration to those who probe its depths.<sup>204</sup>

Hafen chose to tell this story for good reason. As human beings, we need to tell stories in order to make meaning out of our lives. And as groups we need shared stories. One of the main cycles of stories around which BYU has built its identity are the stories of Hugh Nibley. When Hafen wanted to illustrate that the faculty and staff of BYU must marry the spiritual with the academic, that they should consider themselves on holy ground at their university, what better way to drive his point home than with a story, “a story” which, writes Neil Postman, “gives us direction by providing a kind of theory about how the world works.”<sup>205</sup> And what better person to



*Figure 19. At Normandy Beach, France, 1984. "He took time to appreciate the sacredly beautiful in life."<sup>224</sup>*

pick as the hero of that story than Hugh Nibley, who gives BYU focus and direction by exemplifying the ideal of academic and spiritual excellence.

Because the BYU community has heard so many Nibley stories in the past and because each member of the community knows who Nibley is and what he is about, Hafen's story was even more powerful. When he described the busy and energetic Nibley standing and staring in awe at the beauty of the mountains, everyone got the point. His story made sense and was convincing because everyone present knew of Nibley's intelligence, profound spirituality, and manifold accomplishments. Yet even he took time to appreciate the sacredly beautiful in life. For the people of BYU, Dr. Hugh Winder Nibley represents an ideal. Because of this, he has become and will likely long remain a flourishing BYU legend.

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171. Collected by Sondra Jones in 1971, Wilson Folklore Archives, FA1 286, L. Tom Perry Special Collections.
172. Zmolek, Wilson Folklore Archives, FA4 3.5.2 L.
173. See Zmolek, Wilson Folklore Archives, FA4 3.5.2 L.
174. See Dan McKinley, "Slippers," interview by author.
175. Reyna, 36.
176. Knight, "Behind the Legend," B1.
177. See Robinson, "Flashlight in Library."
178. Knight, "Behind the Legend," B12.
179. Jones, "(PC + CB) X SD (R + I + E) = HERO," 245–46.
180. Richard N. Holzapfel, "No Rest in San Fran," interview by author.
181. Zmolek, Wilson Folklore Archives, FA4 3.5.2 L.
182. Jones, Wilson Folklore Archives, FA1 286.
183. Gary Dayton, "Kresimir," interview by author.

184. See Dayton, "Kresimir."
185. Robinson, "Flawed Methodology."
186. Stephen E. Robinson, "Defender of the Faith," interview by author.
187. Richard N. Holzapfel, "Apologist," interview by author.
188. Samuel R. Rushforth, "Clean Air Symposia," interview by author.
189. Richard N. Holzapfel, "Nibley the Prophet," interview by author.
190. Stephen E. Robinson, "Type Figure," interview by author.
191. Reyna, 38.
192. Madsen, Wilson Folklore Archives, FA1 576.
193. Richard N. Holzapfel, "Picking Berries," interview by author.
194. Norton, "Eccentric but Committed."
195. See Cracroft, "Seminary."
196. Don E. Norton, "Scholarship in the Church," interview by author.
197. Don E. Norton, "Underestimates Contribution," interview by author.
198. Gary Dayton, "Barbershop Questions," interview by author.
199. Knight, "Behind the Legend," B1.
200. See Zmolek, Wilson Folklore Archives, FA4 3.5.2 L.
201. Irvine, "Hugh Nibley: Profile of a Scholar," 5.
202. Gary Dayton, "Last Book," interview by author.
203. Maynes, "Nibleys: Pianist, Scholar, Brilliant but Different," 7.
204. Bruce C. Hafen, "Come, Come, Ye Saints" (speech, Brigham Young University Conference, Provo, UT, August 28, 1995), BYU Speeches, <https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/bruce-c-hafen/come-come-ye-saints/>.
205. Postman, "Learning by Story," 122.
206. Photograph by Stephen T. Whitlock, 1 February 2021. Photo ID: \_H BLL-ASR\_STW9071-ECS.jpeg.
207. Petersen Collection, box 9. Photo ID: H BLL-BoydP-W0000229-EC-Box9.jpg.
208. Petersen Collection, box 10, folder 4. See Boyd Jay Petersen, *Hugh Nibley: A Consecrated Life* (Draper, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2002), 21. Photo ID: H BLL-BoydP-\_STW8543-ECR-Box10Folder4.jpeg.
209. Volume from the BYU H BLL Nibley Ancient Studies Room. Title page of Jacques P. Migne, ed., *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca*. 161 vols. Paris, France, vol. 58, 1862. <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015089062890>. Photograph by Stephen T. Whitlock, 1 February 2021. Photo ID: \_STW9063.jpeg.
210. Nibley Collection, box 285, folder 10. See Petersen, *Hugh Nibley*, 188. Photo ID: \_H BLL-HughN\_STW9007-EC-Box285Folder10.jpg.
211. Nibley Collection, box 287. Photo ID: H BLL-HughN\_STW9036-ECS-Box287.jpg.
212. Petersen Collection, box 10, folder 4. See Petersen, *Hugh Nibley*, 208. Photo ID: H BLL-BoydP-\_STW8550-ECR-Box10Folder4.jpeg.
213. Petersen Collection, box 10, folder 4. See Petersen, *Hugh Nibley*, 96. Photo ID: H BLL-BoydP-\_STW8705-EC-Box10Folder4.jpeg.



214. See Petersen, *Hugh Nibley*, 305. Petersen Collection, box 1, folder 1. Photo ID: HBLL-BoydP-\_STW8043-EC-Box1Folder1.jpeg.
215. Nibley Collection, box 289, folder 35. Photo ID: HBLL-HughN-\_STW8345-EC-Box289Folder35.jpeg.
216. Nibley Collection, box 285, folder 9; Petersen Collection, box 1, folder 1. Description of top image from Finding Aid: Plastic pin in the shape of a running shoe, painted by a friend to represent the purple running shoes Nibley would often wear. See Gillum, "The Man," 758 (this volume). Bottom image is a detail from a photo by Mark A. Philbrick, BYU Photo. Published in *BYU Today*, February 1984, 18–19. With permission. Photo IDs: HBLL-HughN-\_STW9004-Box285.jpeg; HBLL-BoydP-\_STW8056-ECR-Box1Folder1 (1).jpeg.
217. The home has now been torn down and replaced by an apartment building. Courtesy of Shirley S. Ricks. Photo ID: Ricks SS Nibley home on 700 N-E.jpg.
218. The script for the Shalamar skit is included as appendix E of Petersen, *Hugh Nibley*, 431–37. According to Gary Gillum, "The person on the far left in the photo is Nibley's and my mutual colleague and friend, Dr. H. Curtis Wright, who wrote a book on ancient metallic documents" (email message to Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, February 7, 2021). Photo courtesy of BYU HBLL Special Collections, BYU Women Records (UA 545), box 4, folder 1. Photo ID: SRicks-Screen Shot 2021-02-07 at 4.50.21 AM-E.jpg.
219. Photo of Hugh Nibley, *Abraham in Egypt* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000), 542. Photo ID: STW017-EC.jpg.
220. Photo by Mark A. Philbrick, BYU Photo. Published in *BYU Today*, February 1984, 18–19. With permission. Petersen Collection, box 1, folder 1. Photo ID: HBLL-BoydP-\_STW8056-ECR-Box1Folder1.jpeg.
221. Nibley Collection, box 289, folder 36. Photo ID: HBLL-HughN-\_STW8346-EC-Box289Folder36.jpg.
222. According to Paul Nibley, "Paul Springer had a stereo camera and he visited Utah at about that time. [So it was probably] a stereo viewer" (Email message to Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, January 22, 2020). Courtesy David Nibley. Photo ID: stereopictures.jpeg.
223. Left: Nibley Collection, box 286. Finding Aid descriptions: Underwood Standard Typewriter, vintage, ca. 1920–40. Photo by Stephen T. Whitlock, February 1, 2021. Photo ID: HBLL-HughN-\_STW9044-EC-Box286.jpg. Right: Courtesy of Blair Hodges, March 5, 2021. Photo ID: DSC\_0996-E.jpg.
224. Nibley Collection, box 292, folder 33. Photo ID: HBLL-HughN-\_STW8521-EC-Box292Folder33.jpeg.