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Book of Mormon Critical Text Project Completes Text Analysis

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INSIGHTS

The Newsletter of the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship

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Book of Mormon Critical Text Project Completes Text Analysis

The Maxwell Institute and Brigham Young University are pleased to announce the publication of part 6 of volume 4 of the Book of Mormon Critical Text Project, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon*. Part 6 analyzes the text from 3 Nephi 19 through Moroni 10.

Royal Skousen, an internationally known professor of linguistics and English language at Brigham Young University, has been the editor of the Book of Mormon Critical Text Project since 1988.

This last part of volume 4 of the critical text of the Book of Mormon completes the basic textual analysis of the Book of Mormon. There is also an addenda section at the end of this part (covering almost 100 pages) that treats a number of additional conjectures to the text and, in a few cases, revises the analysis for several items already discussed in volume 4.

Now that part 6 is published, it is possible to reconstruct the “historical text of the Book of Mormon” — that is, the earliest text, including conjectural changes based on evidence from usage and scribal practice elsewhere in the text. Basically, the historical text is the original English-language text, to the extent that it can be determined by scholarly means.

Skousen’s work has garnered praise from scholars familiar with Book of Mormon studies. Grant Hardy, professor of history at the University of North Carolina at Asheville and editor of *The Book of Mormon: A Reader’s Edition*, describes Skousen and his project: “Skousen is a scholar’s scholar. He examines everything, his arguments are meticulously reasoned, he uses all the available resources of modern academia, he is generous (often giving credit to students who came up with possible readings), he always gives full consideration to alternative explanations and inconvenient evidence, and he seems willing to go wherever the evidence leads. . . . As a historian who has spent his professional life working with critical editions of ancient texts, my response to Skousen’s book is awe and humility.”¹

Terryl L. Givens, professor of literature and religion at the University of Richmond and author of *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture that Launched a New World Religion*, says of one analysis in Skousen’s work: “This strikes me as more than just careful editorial work. This is a brilliantly fashioned argument that is carefully reasoned, meticulously argued, and reliant upon the best kind of intellectual effort: because he gives both readings the full benefit of the doubt, conceives hypotheses that substantiate both readings, and scours the text for corroborating evidence. And he repeats this procedure hundreds of times.”²

Skousen is currently working on volumes 3 and 5 of the Book of Mormon Critical Text Project. Volume 3 will describe in detail the history of the text of the Book of Mormon, including the editing of the text into standard English, and will also provide a description of the original English-language text of the book. Volume 5 will feature a computerized collation of the two Book of Mormon manuscripts (the original manuscript and the printer’s manuscript) and 20 printed editions from 1830 to 1981. Volumes 3 and 5 are slated to appear in 2011 or 2012.

Part 6 of *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon* is available from the BYU Bookstore. ♦

Notes

1. Grant Hardy, “Scholarship for the Ages,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 15/1 (2006): 48.
2. Terryl L. Givens, “The Book of Mormon Critical Text Project,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 15/1 (2006): 35.

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Editor’s Note: The Maxwell Institute invited Professor Royal Skousen to describe part 6 of volume 4.

Changes in the Text

The most important part of the critical text project is to analyze the textual variation in the text of the Book of Mormon and to recover the original text, to the extent possible. Here are four of the more significant cases of textual variation that are discussed in part 6:

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- Mormon 8:28
yea it shall come in a day
when the power of God shall be denied
and churches become defiled
and shall be lifted up in the pride of their hearts
yea even in a day
**when leaders of churches and teachers
in the pride of their hearts**
even to the envying of them
who belong to their churches

There seems to be a missing predicate here for the phrase “yea even in a day when leaders of churches and teachers in the pride of their hearts”. German Ellsworth, the Northern States Mission president at the turn of the last century, in his later editing (in 1907) of the 1905 LDS missionary edition, tried to deal with the apparent ellipsis here by supplying the words *shall rise*, thus “yea even in a day when leaders of churches and teachers **shall rise** in the pride of their hearts”. The current LDS text has maintained Ellsworth’s emendation. But internal evidence suggests that the missing words were *shall be lifted up*, thus “yea even in a day when leaders of churches and teachers **shall be lifted up** in the pride of their hearts”. Note, in particular, the preceding language in this verse: “and churches become defiled and **shall be lifted up** in the pride of their hearts”. The ellipted “shall be lifted up” is also supported by numerous occurrences of this phraseology elsewhere in the Book of Mormon text.

- Ether 1:11–12
and Seth was the son of **Shiblon**
and **Shiblon** was the son of Com

This is the only name listed in the genealogy at the beginning of the book of Ether that takes a different form later on in that book; namely, in Ether 11 the form of the name is *Shiblom* rather than *Shiblon*. Scribal evidence suggests that *Shiblon* was probably the original name of the Jaredite king in the book of Ether; it was written correctly in Ether 1, but later on in Ether 11 was incorrectly written as *Shiblom*. The probable source of the error was a tendency to produce a labial *m* after pronouncing the labial *b*. In the original manuscript for Alma 38:5, when Oliver Cowdery wrote down the name for the son of Alma, he initially wrote *Shiblom*,

then erased the final *m* and wrote *n*. This scribal error provides support for an error tendency towards *Shiblom*.

- Ether 1:41
go to and gather together thy flocks
— both male and female — of every kind
and also of the seed of the earth of every kind
and thy **family**
and also Jared thy brother and his **family**
and also thy friends and their **families**
and the friends of Jared and their **families**

In this verse, the printer’s manuscript has the singular *family* when the reference is to an individual (thus the brother of Jared and his family as well as Jared and his family), but the plural *families* when the text refers to the brother of Jared’s friends and to Jared’s friends. In other words, each individual has one family. Unfortunately, the 1830 typesetter accidentally set *families* when referring to the family of the brother of Jared, probably because his eye caught the plural *families* in the next manuscript line (“& also thy friends & their **families**”). There is clearly no intent in the original text to assign more than one family to the brother of Jared; the singular reading of the original text should be restored here, even though the plural reading has caused some controversy, especially during the early 1900s.

- Moroni 10:33
then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God
through the shedding of the blood of Christ
which is in the covenant of the Father
unto the remission of your sins
that ye become **holy without spot**

The printer’s manuscript here reads “holy without spot”. All editions have kept the spelling *holy*, but one wonders if Joseph Smith didn’t actually dictate *wholly*. There would have been no difference in pronunciation, nor much motivation for the scribe to have asked which word was intended. In other words, we have two possible readings here:

- . . . that ye become **holy**, without spot
- . . . that ye become **wholly** without spot

This possible emendation of *wholly* in place of *holy* was first suggested in 1991 by one of my students, Kevin Quinn. Later, in 1994 a thorough analysis of this passage was made by another student, Brent Johnson. The committee for the 1920 LDS edition, apparently aware of the potential problem here in Moroni 10:33, decided to place a comma after *holy*, thus guaranteeing the first reading. In his analysis, Johnson suggested a third reading, one that involves inserting an *and*:

. . . that ye become **holy and** without spot

Ultimately, usage in the New Testament argues that in Moroni 10:33 the word *holy* is correct: “but that it should be holy and without blemish” (Ephesians 5:27). It should be noted, however, that this biblical passage supports the third possibility of having an *and* between *holy* and *without spot*.

Vocabulary from Early Modern English

One of the important findings of the critical text project has been the use in the original text of vocabulary from the 1500s and 1600s — and not just vocabulary that can be found in the King James Bible. Here are a couple of examples of archaic vocabulary that are discussed in part 6 of volume 4:

- 3 Nephi 26:3
even until the elements should melt with fervent heat
and the earth should be **wrapped** together as a scroll
and the heavens and the earth should pass away

Usage elsewhere in Book of Mormon suggests that the verb here could be *rolled* rather than *wrapped*, as in Mormon 5:23 (“and at his great command the earth shall be **rolled** together as a scroll”) and in Mormon 9:2 (“yea even that great day when the earth shall be rolled together as a scroll”). Yet the Oxford English Dictionary (under definition 9 for the verb *wrap*) indicates that one meaning for the verb *wrap* is ‘to wind or fold up or together . . . to roll or gather up’; thus the phrase “wrap together” in 3 Nephi 26:3 can be considered equivalent to “roll together”. In fact, the OED cites the following biblical passage in support of this usage (here given in the King James version): “and Elijah took

his mantle and wrapped *it* together and smote the waters” (2 Kings 2:8). The OED also provides a citation that refers to both heaven and earth as being wrapped up (here cited with modern spelling):

William Watreman (1555)

the beginner of things visible wrapped up
both heaven and earth . . . together in one pattern

Thus the reference in the Book of Mormon to the earth being wrapped up as a scroll is fully acceptable.

- Moroni 10:26
and woe unto them
which shall **do these things away** and die
for they die in their sins
and they cannot be saved in the kingdom of God

The phrase “do these things away” seems very odd to modern readers, but in Early Modern English this phrase meant ‘to put away, dismiss’. This meaning is listed under definition 44 for the verb *do* in the Oxford English Dictionary. The last quotation cited in the OED with this meaning comes from Edmund Spenser in 1596: “Do fear away and tell”. Earlier in verse 24, Moroni once more uses this phraseology: “if the day cometh that the power and gifts of God shall be **done away** among you / it shall be because of unbelief”.

Statistical Summary for Part 6

Part 6 has 630 pages of text and covers the last 16 percent of the Book of Mormon text. Out of 806 cases of variation (or potential variation) that are analyzed, there are 304 differences between the critical text and the standard text. Moreover, 52 readings have never appeared in any standard printed edition: one is in the original manuscript only, another in both the original manuscript and the printer’s manuscript, 27 in the printer’s manuscript only (in these cases the original manuscript is not extant), and 23 are conjectured readings. In addition, 47 readings make a difference that would show up in any translation, 18 make the Book of Mormon text more consistent in phraseology or usage, and four restore a unique phrase or word choice to the text. ♦