



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

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## Book of Mormon Critical Text Project Continues with New Volume

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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 Continues with New Volume

The Maxwell Institute and Brigham Young University are pleased to announce the release of part 4 of volume 4 of the Book of Mormon Critical Text Project, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon*. Part 4 analyzes the text from Alma 21 to Alma 55.

Volume 4 represents the central task of the project, which is to recover the original English-language text of the Book of Mormon. 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.

Skousen's work has garnered praise from scholars familiar with Book of Mormon studies. 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 Skousen's work: "One cannot come away less than profoundly impressed by the efforts to which Skousen goes to analyze each and every disputed reading. He has provided us all with a model of the best textual scholarship we have seen."<sup>1</sup>

Grant Hardy, professor and chairman of the Department of History at the University of North Carolina at Asheville and editor of *The Book of Mormon: A Reader's Edition*, describes the project as "perhaps the most important study of the Book of Mormon ever done. . . . It is hard to imagine [his] work ever being done better. Given his narrow focus on the text, the limited number of sources in existence, and the thoroughness of his treatment, the great-grandchildren of scholars yet unborn will consult his commentaries to get as close as possible to the Book of Mormon in its original form. Just as Jewish readers still consult the work of the ancient Masorete scribes—who punctuated, pointed, and annotated the Hebrew Bible—so also Skousen's critical text project will serve as the starting point for serious scholarship of the Book of Mormon for centuries."<sup>2</sup>

Part 4 of volume 4 examines 996 cases of variation (or potential variation) in the text. For 423 of these cases, the critical text proposes readings that differ from the standard text (the current edition). Of these proposed alternate readings, 150 have never appeared in any standard printed edition of the Book of Mormon while 56 readings make a difference in meaning that would show up in any translation of the English text of the Book of Mormon into another language. In addition, 16 readings make the text fully consistent in phraseology or usage, while 4 readings restore a unique phrase or word choice to the text.

Skousen summarizes some of the interesting points he discusses thoroughly in part 4:

- The current text in Alma 33:21 reads redundantly: "If ye could **be healed** by merely casting about your eyes that ye might **be healed**, would ye not behold quickly?" The original manuscript is sufficiently extant here that we can determine that the second instance of *be healed* actually reads *behold*. Oliver Cowdery misread the original *behold* as *be healed* when he copied the text from the original manuscript into the printer's manuscript. In other words, the original text read as follows: "If ye could be healed by merely casting about your eyes that ye might **behold**, would ye not **behold** quickly?" The emphasis here is on beholding quickly: If you knew you could be healed by just looking, wouldn't you go look as soon as possible?

- In Alma 42:2, the text is reviewing Adam's expulsion from the Garden of Eden. The original manuscript is extant here and reads "yea he **drove** out the man", which is how the King James Bible reads in Genesis 3:24: "so he **drove** out the man". When Oliver Cowdery copied this part of the text into the printer's manuscript, he misread *drove* as *drew*. All the printed editions have retained this visual misreading.

- Except for Book of Mormon names, Joseph Smith relied on his scribes' ability to spell biblical names as well as words of English. In many instances, the scribes had to determine the spelling of homophones as they took down Joseph's dictation.

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## Book of Mormon Critical Text Project

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One difficulty was whether the word was *rites* or *rights*, especially in the phrase “rights of worship” (which occurs twice in the text, in Alma 43:35 and Alma 44:5). In both cases, Oliver Cowdery spelled the word as *rites* in the manuscripts, and the printed editions have retained this interpretation of the homophone. Usage elsewhere in the text argues that *rights* is the correct interpretation for this phrase.

- At Alma 49:5 in the original manuscript, Oliver Cowdery initially wrote “in preparing their places of security”, but this was a mistake. He immediately corrected the word *preparing* (spelled as *prepairing*) by erasing the initial *p*, thus giving the correct reading: “in **repairing** their places of security”. But when Oliver copied the text into the printer’s manuscript, he ended up writing *preparing* once more (again spelled as *prepairing*). This time he did not correct his error. All the printed editions have therefore maintained the word *preparing* here, but *repairing* is correct since this passage is referring to how Moroni had had the city of Ammonihah rebuilt in advance of the attack of the Lamanites. For this city the Nephites had repaired their places of security.

In 2004, FARMS published part 1 of volume 4 (which analyzes the text from the title page of the Book of Mormon through 2 Nephi 10). Subsequent

installments of volume 4 have been published each year, with completion of the final part expected in 2009.

Volumes 1 and 2 of the Critical Text Project were published in May 2001. Volume 1 contains a detailed transcription of the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon (the manuscript written down by scribes as Joseph Smith dictated the text). Volume 2 contains a transcription of the printer’s manuscript, the copy made from the original manuscript and taken to Grandin’s print shop in Palmyra, New York, for typesetting the first edition of the Book of Mormon (1830). 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. Volume 3 will also provide a description of the original English-language text of the book. Volume 5 will feature a computerized collation of the two manuscripts and 20 printed editions from 1830 to 1981. Volumes 3 and 5 will appear after volume 4 has been completely published.

Part 4 of *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon* is available from the Maxwell Institute Web site ([maxwellinstitute.byu.edu](http://maxwellinstitute.byu.edu)). 

### Notes

1. Terryl L. Givens, “The Book of Mormon Critical Text Project,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 15/1 (2006): 35.
2. Grant Hardy, “Scholarship for the Ages,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 15/1 (2006): 50–51.

## Research in the Arabian Peninsula Continues

In July 2007, David Johnson, professor of anthropology, Kent Brown, director of FARMS, and Revell Phillips, emeritus professor of geology, all of BYU, were joined by Sidney Rempel of Arizona State University in an archaeological excavation on the southern coast of the Sultanate of Oman.

One of the chief interests of the excavation was to establish when people inhabited an area in and around Mughsayl, which lies 45 kilometers west of Salalah. Mughsayl stands at the mouth of the largest drainage in southern Oman, a wadi called Wadi Ashawq. For hundreds of years, camel caravans traveled up this wadi carrying goods west toward Yemen.

The archaeologists hoped to establish whether the settlements at Mughsayl participated both in the land trade, via caravans, and in the waterborne trade along the coast, and whether it was inhabited as early as the early Iron Age (1,000 to 300 BC). Initial pottery finds indicate an occupation in one place about 700 BC, but it requires further study. The presence of an enormous number of seashells may point to trade in shells as far away as Petra where such shells were used as wind chimes and as decorations on veils of temples.

An archaeological team will return to Oman, likely in 2008, to continue work at Mughsayl and to plan future work in Wadi Sayq. They see their work contributing both to an overall picture of early civilizations in that region as well as to learning about the world into which Lehi and Sariah walked when they emerged from the desert. 