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**Abstract** *Review of New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology* (1993), edited by Brent Lee Metcalfe.

**Brent Lee Metcalfe, ed., *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology*.**

**Critical Methodology  
and the Text of the Book of Mormon**

Reviewed by Royal Skousen

Signature Books' most recent critique of the Book of Mormon is entitled *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon*. According to its subtitle, *Explorations in Critical Methodology*, this book of essays edited by Brent Metcalfe claims to represent an emphasis on critical methodology. In this review, I will examine this claim from the point of view of textual criticism. Preliminary findings from the Book of Mormon critical text project contradict in large part the claims in Metcalfe's book (especially in the articles by Larson, Ashment, and Metcalfe). Contrary to their arguments, the evidence from the critical text project strongly supports the claim that the Book of Mormon was a revelation given through the Prophet Joseph Smith.

**The Practice of New Testament Textual Criticism**

The first article in Metcalfe's book to bring up critical text issues is Stan Larson's textual analysis of the Sermon on the Mount (pp. 115–63). In this article Larson compares the Book of Mormon version of the sermon (3 Nephi 12–14) with what textual critics of the dominant school (from Tischendorf to the Alands) have proposed is the original text for the New Testament's version of the sermon (Matthew 5–7). Larson selects eight variant passages from the Sermon on the Mount that all these textual critics have agreed on and shows that in all eight cases the Book of Mormon reading is different. Moreover, for each of these eight passages the Book of Mormon agrees with the "Textus Receptus" (or "Received Text"), the traditional New Testament Greek text which derives ultimately from Erasmus's 1516 Greek edition. Since the Textus Receptus served as the basis for the 1611 King James Version of the New Testament, Larson concludes that the Book of Mormon text for the Sermon

on the Mount is a nineteenth-century adaptation from the King James Bible.

There are a number of serious problems with Larson's argument. Consider first his statement that his selection of "all the major late-nineteenth- and twentieth-century critical editions of the Greek New Testament" represents "a diverse range of critical positions" (p. 119). What Larson fails to describe here is the basic unity of all these critical editions, that their practice derives from a single school of textual criticism whose foundation was established by the German scholar Johann Jakob Griesbach in the late eighteenth century.<sup>1</sup> The basic assumption of this school is that in choosing between competing readings, one selects the more difficult and/or shorter reading, when no other explanation seems apparent.<sup>2</sup> Given this assumption, we should not be surprised at the "agreement" between these different critical editions.<sup>3</sup>

Of course, Larson simply assumes that the results of modern New Testament textual criticism are correct and lead us back to the original text of the New Testament. There are several problems here. First of all, there is no way he can demonstrate that the reconstructed text of the critics is in fact the original text. The text that has been reconstructed is based largely on third-to-sixth-century manuscripts, not the original autographs.<sup>4</sup>

More importantly, preliminary work on the Book of Mormon text suggests that the basic assumption that the original reading is the harder or shorter variant cannot be maintained. A couple of years ago I prepared a list of the significant textual differences that had been discovered as part of the critical text project. This list contains 39 textual differences between the original and printer's manuscripts that make a difference in meaning. Yet of those 39 textual changes, in only six cases is the harder reading in the original manuscript, whereas in 22 cases the harder reading is in the printer's manuscript, a copy of the original. (In 11 cases, there is no distinguishable difficulty between the

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<sup>1</sup> Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 3d ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 119; also see Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 9–10, for Griesbach's debt to earlier scholars.

<sup>2</sup> For the "basic rules" of textual criticism, see Aland and Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, 280–81.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 28–29.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 81–82.

readings.) In other words, when Oliver Cowdery copied the original manuscript to produce the printer's manuscript, he was much more prone to create difficult readings than smooth out difficult readings in the original manuscript.

Similarly, Oliver Cowdery tended to shorten the text rather than expand it. In 27 of the 39 significant changes, no deletion or addition is involved. But of the remaining 12 cases involving changes in length, 11 of them are textual contractions; only one is an expansion. This result is completely contrary to the basic assumption of New Testament textual criticism that the text expands. This same point against textual expansion was argued by the classicist Albert C. Clark in *The Primitive Text of the Gospels and Acts* (1914) and *The Descent of Manuscripts* (1918), but unfortunately Clark's empirical evidence from actual manuscript transcription has largely been ignored by New Testament textual critics.<sup>5</sup>

These same two tendencies (of shortening the text and creating difficult readings) are found in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon. On the other hand, the editing that has occurred in later editions of the Book of Mormon does generally accord with the traditional tendency to expand the text and smooth out difficult readings. I would suggest that the main reason for this difference has to do with the perceived goal of the scribe or editor. Both Oliver Cowdery and the 1830 printer were chiefly interested in copying the text in front of them and for the most part made no conscious changes in the text or its grammar (although they did, of course, make changes in accidentals such as spelling, capitalization, punctuation, paragraphing, and so on). On the other hand, beginning with Joseph Smith's editing for the second edition of the Book of Mormon (Kirtland, 1837), we see editors mostly concerned with how the text will be understood and accepted by readers. In such cases, changes are made to facilitate the reading of the text.

Basically, New Testament textual criticism works on the assumption that the scribes acted as editors rather than as copyists. This seems to me to be a highly unlikely possibility, especially in the early days of the Christian church. When the original autographs were first copied, the scribes would have proba-

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<sup>5</sup> Albert C. Clark, *The Primitive Text of the Gospels and Acts* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1914); Albert C. Clark, *The Descent of Manuscripts* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1918), xi; Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*, 161-63.

bly been lay members with some education (much like Oliver Cowdery), but not professional scribes.<sup>6</sup> Only in the following centuries, when the Christian church was more firmly established, would we have had scribes who would have taken upon themselves the task of editing the text. Like the Book of Mormon text, the early history of the New Testament text should have introduced more difficult and shorter readings.

One other important aspect of the text is the degree to which original readings are recoverable. Again, we do not know the early history of the New Testament text. We do not have the originals, and we have no idea how many times the original itself was copied. And we cannot simply assume that our current textual sources derive from multiple copies of the original. Of course, textual critics such as the Alands may claim that we can be sure that the correct reading always exists among the variants and "only needs to be identified,"<sup>7</sup> but there is no way to test (that is, disprove) this hypothesis since the early history of the New Testament text is unknown. Even the extant manuscripts, although numbering in the thousands, are so far removed from their originals that no one has been successful in determining the genealogical relationships (or stemmas) for any book in the New Testament.<sup>8</sup>

But given the known history of the Book of Mormon text, the Alands' claim (that the original reading can still be found among the variants) seems incredible. One striking aspect of the textual history of the Book of Mormon has been our inability to recover the original reading without having the original text in front of us. For instance, in the list of 39 examples of significant textual differences, none of the original readings have ever been restored by conjectural emendation. Even in the 23 cases in which a difficult reading was created in the printer's manuscript, apparently no one has ever noticed that there was even a difficult reading until the easier reading was first found in the original manuscript. Actual empirical evidence suggests that without the earliest text we have no sure way to recover the vast majority of changes that a text may have undergone.

The history of the Book of Mormon text also clearly indicates that errors entered the text from the very beginning. In fact, there are errors in the original manuscript itself. And in his

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<sup>6</sup> Aland and Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, 70.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 296.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

copying Oliver Cowdery made on the average about three textual changes per manuscript page. Within the first year of the text's history, the Book of Mormon underwent a considerable number of changes that have not been recovered except by reference to the original manuscript.

The hollowness of New Testament textual criticism becomes fully apparent when we realize that virtually all the specific readings in the reconstructed New Testament text are non-falsifiable and based upon assumptions that are contradicted by established examples of manuscript copying. Thus Larson's whole attempt to compare the biblical quotations in the Book of Mormon text with the New Testament text reconstructed by textual critics has no empirical basis.

### The Book of Mormon and the King James Bible

Another issue that Larson brings up is the relationship between the King James Version of the Bible (KJV) and the biblical passages quoted in the Book of Mormon. As part of his argument, Larson gives an example of a biblical quotation in the original manuscript which, he believes, shows that Joseph Smith worked directly from a King James Bible (pp. 129–30). In the original manuscript, 1 Nephi 20:11 first read as follows:

for mine own sake yea for mine own sake will I do this  
for *how should I* suffer my name to be polluted and I  
will not give my glory unto another

The words "how should I" were crossed out and replaced by the words "I will not" written above the crossout. This change creates a parallelism with the following clause (which begins with "I will not"):

for mine own sake yea for mine own sake will I do this  
for *I will not* suffer my name to be polluted and **I will**  
**not** give my glory unto another

The corresponding Isaiah passage (48:11) basically agrees with the first reading of the original manuscript, not the revised reading:

for mine own sake *even* mine own sake will I do *it* for  
how should *my name* be polluted and I will not give my  
glory unto another [*italics* = KJV italics]

Larson assumes the following scenario for this change: Joseph Smith has a King James Bible in front of him and is reading off the text, making changes here and there, especially when the King James words are in italics. In this case, however, Joseph first gives a text that is fairly close to the original King James, then he changes his mind and makes the question into a statement that parallels the following clause.

The problem with Larson's analysis is that it is based on an isolated example. Larson assumes here that the correction is an immediate one, but the actual crossout and supralinear insertion do not prove this. It is also possible that the correction could have been done somewhat later. Now if the phrase "I will not" had been written on the original line so that it immediately followed the crossout, then this would be evidence for an immediate correction. As it stands, we are unable from this example to know if the correction was immediate or later editing done either under Joseph Smith's direction or independently by Oliver Cowdery himself (since the supralinear correction is in his hand). Only the corrected form occurs in the printer's manuscript, so this change in the original manuscript occurred before Oliver Cowdery copied this passage into the printer's manuscript.

In order to even discuss this change in the original manuscript, we need much more information. As part of the critical text project, we are identifying all the changes that are found in the original manuscript (as well as the printer's manuscript). We note where the change occurs (supralinearly, sublinearly, by insertion, or immediately following [on the same line]). We also note the level of ink flow since immediate corrections tend to be at the same ink level but later corrections are usually in heavier ink. (Still, ink level is not a foolproof test for immediacy.) Sometimes corrections are done in pencil—there is even an example of this on the original manuscript—or in a different color of ink, which clearly indicates a later correction. Sometimes the scribal hand for the correction differs. We have found examples of Oliver Cowdery correcting the original hand of another scribe on the original manuscript. And in the printer's manuscript we even have a few examples where Oliver first writes down the text as it is in the original manuscript, but then he consciously changes the text, apparently to improve the syntax. Thus there is clear evidence that Oliver himself did occasionally correct the text—and without approval from Joseph



Smith. Such information should make us more cautious about accepting Larson's interpretation of the change in 1 Nephi 20:11.

### **Italics in the King James Bible**

Larson also claims that Joseph Smith knew that italicized words in the King James Bible represent words that are not found in the original languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek), but were added by the translators to complete the intended sense of the original. As before, Larson gives a few examples to support his contention (pp. 130–31), but does not give a complete analysis.

In 1991, as a part of a course on textual criticism of the Book of Mormon, three of my students (William Calhoun, Margaret Robbins, and Andrew Stewart) wrote research papers on various aspects of this question. Calhoun and Robbins examined various copies of the King James Bible (including a good number that were printed in the early decades of the 1800s).<sup>9</sup> As one might suspect, they found examples of variation in the use of italics, even in King James Bibles published after the supposedly final revision of 1769. Moreover, Calhoun notes that he found only one Bible (printed in London in 1800) that actually mentions (in an introduction) what the italics mean.<sup>10</sup> The original 1611 edition does not explain the use of italics; in fact, it silently borrowed the idea from the Geneva Bible, which does explain the use of italics.<sup>11</sup> Given the general lack of knowledge even today about what the italics mean in the King James Bible, one might surely wonder if Joseph Smith himself knew this, especially in those early years when he was translating the Book of Mormon.

Calhoun and Robbins also compared the italicized words in the King James Bible with the original text of the Book of Mormon (as found in the two manuscripts). And both discovered many examples where Joseph Smith deleted, added, or

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<sup>9</sup> William Calhoun, "Isaiah, Italics, and the Book of Mormon," and Margaret Robbins, "King James Version as a Source for the Biblical Passages Quoted in the Book of Mormon," unpublished research papers for Royal Skousen's Fall 1991 course on textual criticism of the Book of Mormon, Brigham Young University.

<sup>10</sup> Calhoun, "Isaiah, Italics, and the Book of Mormon," 2.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 1–2.

altered words that are not in italics in any of the King James printings they examined. Each concluded that there was no direct connection between the italics and the original Book of Mormon text. Simply giving examples where changes correspond with italics means nothing; one must look at all the changes, including the ones that occur independently of italics.

There is also the possibility that the source for the biblical quotations in the Book of Mormon could come from other English Bibles (namely, ones published prior to the King James Version, beginning with Tyndale's New Testament [from as early as 1526] and ending with the Geneva Bible and its various editions). Most of the phraseology of the King James Bible is dependent upon previous editions of the English Bible.<sup>12</sup> In fact, as part of the critical text project I have discovered evidence (from variation in the use of the definite article *the*) that the compositors for the King James Bible set type from a minimally edited copy of an earlier edition of the English Bible. In fact, nearly all the English translations during the 1500s and early 1600s were minor revisions. Only Tyndale's translation (of the New Testament and the first half of the Old Testament) and part of Matthew's Bible (the second half of the Old Testament, translated by Miles Coverdale) represent fresh translations into English.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, nearly all the famous passages for which the King James translation is praised can be found in these early English editions. Consequently, it is not immediately obvious that the passages quoted in the Book of Mormon are strictly from the King James Bible.

In order to test this question, Andy Stewart (one of the students from my class) compared the various translations into Early Modern English, looking for unique substantive readings in these passages. Interestingly, he found that the Book of Mormon biblical quotations, except for one example, agreed with the unique substantive readings found in the King James Bible.<sup>14</sup> Thus what has been taken as obvious can in fact be

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<sup>12</sup> S. L. Greenslade, "English Versions of the Bible, 1525-1611," in S. L. Greenslade, ed., *The Cambridge History of the Bible: The West from the Reformation to the Present Day* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 144-45, 165-66; David Daniell, *Tyndale's New Testament* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), vii-xiv.

<sup>13</sup> David Daniell, *Tyndale's Old Testament* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), xxiv-xxvii.

<sup>14</sup> Andy Stewart, "KJV as a Source for the Biblical Quotations in the Book of Mormon," unpublished research paper for Royal Skousen's Fall

shown to be correct. The assumption that the Book of Mormon biblical quotations come from the King James Bible has, until now, been based on simple familiarity with the King James Bible and not by comparing that translation with the earlier translations that the King James Version is dependent upon.

The one exception Stewart found is in the famous example from 2 Nephi 12:16 (Isaiah 2:16), where the text reads "upon all the ships of the sea and upon all the ships of Tarshish." The first phrase is found in the Septuagint (or koine Greek) version of Isaiah, the second in the Masoretic (or traditional Hebrew) text. While looking for unique substantive readings, Stewart discovered that the first phrase (but not the second) occurs in Coverdale's Bible ("upon all shippes of the sea"), while all the other early English Bibles have only the second phrase.<sup>15</sup> Quite possibly Coverdale's translation is based on the Septuagint, but in any event this is an interesting discovery, one that would not have occurred had we simply assumed that the Book of Mormon biblical quotations were from the King James Bible.

### Joseph Smith and the Bible

Much of the discussion throughout Metcalfe's book presumes that Joseph Smith knew his Bible thoroughly. This conclusion seems especially apparent in David Wright's analysis of Alma 12-13 and its relationship with Hebrews (pp. 165-229). Yet despite the textual complexity of the Book of Mormon, the historical evidence strongly suggests that, as a young man, Joseph Smith was not a student of the Bible. For instance, Joseph's mother claimed that her other children read the Bible, but that Joseph, on the other hand, was not much of a reader, but instead was always meditating.<sup>16</sup> Volume 1 of Dean Jessee's *The Papers of Joseph Smith* includes a number of independent, contemporary accounts that suggest Joseph Smith had just opened the Bible when his eyes fell upon the verse in

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1991 course on textual criticism of the Book of Mormon, Brigham Young University, 1.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-6.

<sup>16</sup> Lucy Mack Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith, the Prophet, and his Progenitors for many Generations* (Liverpool: Richards, 1853), 84.

James 1:5 that led him in 1820 to receive the vision of the Father and the Son:

He [Joseph Smith] had not proceeded very far in this laudable endeavor [of reading the word of God] when his eyes fell upon the following verse of St. James . . .<sup>17</sup>

While thinking of this matter, I opened the Testament promiscuously on these words, in James . . .<sup>18</sup>

. . . opened his Bible the first Passage that struck him was if any man lack wisdom let him ask of God . . .<sup>19</sup>

We also have an account by Emma Smith that Joseph was originally unaware (when he was translating the book of Lehi) that there were walls around the city of Jerusalem.<sup>20</sup> Besides the actual text of the Book of Mormon, there is not much evidence that Joseph Smith knew the Bible at the time of the translation.

Moreover, witnesses of the translation process consistently claim that Joseph Smith translated by placing either the Urim and Thummim or the seer stone in a hat (to obscure the light in the room) and that he did not actually translate from the physical plates. In answer to a direct question about the use of other materials, Emma Smith specifically avowed that Joseph never had any manuscripts or books to assist him in the translation.<sup>21</sup> All the witnesses, directly or indirectly, provide strong evidence that Joseph Smith did not use a King James Bible.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Orson Hyde, *Ein Ruf aus der Wüste (A Cry from the Wilderness)*, 14 (1842), in Dean C. Jessee, *The Papers of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1989), 1:406–7.

<sup>18</sup> Joseph Smith interview in *Pittsburgh Gazette* 58/3 (1843), in Jessee, *The Papers of Joseph Smith*, 444.

<sup>19</sup> Journal of Alexander Neibaur (1844), in Jessee, *The Papers of Joseph Smith*, 461.

<sup>20</sup> John W. Welch and Tim Rathbone, "The Translation of the Book of Mormon: Basic Historical Information," F.A.R.M.S. paper, 1986, 8–9.

<sup>21</sup> Emma Smith, "Last Testimony of Sister Emma," *Saints' Herald* 26 (1 October 1879): 289–90.

<sup>22</sup> For general summaries of their testimonies, see Royal Skousen, "Towards a Critical Edition of the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 30/1 (1990): 51–53, and James E. Lancaster, "The Translation of the Book of Mormon," in Dan Vogel, ed., *The Word of God: Essays on Mormon Scripture* (Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books, 1990); also see Martin Harris's testimony in Edward Stevenson, "One of the Three Witnesses:

Traditionally, these witnesses have been ignored, largely because their testimonies conflict with our perceptions of how Joseph Smith translated. Although some witnesses gave statements regarding what Joseph Smith actually saw through the interpreters, these statements represent either hearsay or conjecture. As witnesses, they can only testify concerning what they actually saw going on: both scribe and translator working in open view, without other materials and for long periods of time; Joseph Smith beginning where he left off without being prompted; the scribe reading back to Joseph what had been written down; and Joseph spelling out Book of Mormon names to the scribe.

Interestingly, the original manuscript itself provides independent confirmation for some of these claims, such as the scribe first spelling a name phonetically, then immediately correcting it.<sup>23</sup> Some names could not have been spelled correctly in English without someone actually spelling out the word letter for letter, such as *Coriantumr* (which Oliver Cowdery first wrote in Helaman 1:15 as "Coriantummer"). Moreover, evidence from errors in the original manuscript (such as "an" for *and*, "him" for *them*, and "weed" for *reed*) shows that the manuscript was indeed dictated, not visually copied. And the editing that does occur can be explained as correcting scribal errors or (in a few cases) as somewhat later editing by Oliver Cowdery, but otherwise the text in the original manuscript is very clean and does not provide many examples (if any) of Joseph Smith editing the translation as he dictated the text. The printer's manuscript, on the other hand, is a visual copy of the original manuscript and displays errors based on visual rather than aural misperception.

Finally, the biblical passages extant in the original manuscript are all dictated; the scribe continues to misspell the same words in the same way as in other parts of the manuscript. Joseph Smith did not just hand over a King James Bible, even an emended one, to the scribe to copy the biblical quotations.

Incidents in the Life of Martin Harris," *Latter-Day Saints Millennial Star* 44/5-6 (1882): 86-87. For further information on the translation process, see John W. Welch and Tim Rathbone, "Book of Mormon Translation by Joseph Smith," in Daniel H. Ludlow, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 1:210-13.

<sup>23</sup> Royal Skousen, "Piecing Together the Original Manuscript," *BYU Today* 46/3 (1992): 22-23.

The original manuscript also shows no sign of the biblical chapter system; instead, the biblical passages are grouped into larger chapters based on narrative unity. In 1879 Orson Pratt broke up these larger chapters; and in the case of the biblical quotations, he made the Book of Mormon chapter breaks agree with the traditional biblical system, which dates from late medieval times.<sup>24</sup> But Joseph Smith's dictation, although it includes chapter breaks, ignores the chapter system that would have been found in every King James Bible of his day.

### Non-English Hebraisms

One important result of the critical text project has been the discovery of non-English Hebraisms in the original text of the Book of Mormon. Until now, students of Book of Mormon Hebraisms have limited themselves to those that remain in the current text. But these Hebraisms also show up in the King James Bible, so one could argue that their occurrence in the Book of Mormon text is due to the influence of the King James language style rather than the residue of an original Hebrew language source for the Book of Mormon. Moreover, many of these "King James Hebraisms" are found in the biblical style of Joseph Smith's early revelations, as is pointed out by Ed Ashment in his article in Metcalfe's book (pp. 375–80).

In a recent paper I describe two important examples of Hebraisms in the original text of the Book of Mormon that do not occur in the King James Bible.<sup>25</sup> One example is the use of the *if-and* clausal construction instead of the expected *if-(then)* syntax of English, as in the following extended passage from Helaman 12 where it occurs seven times (thus showing that we are not dealing with an isolated transcriptional error):

- 13    yea and if he sayeth unto the earth move *and* it is  
       moved >  $\emptyset$  (1837)

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<sup>24</sup> M. H. Black, "The Printed Bible," in Greenslade, ed., *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, 419.

<sup>25</sup> Royal Skousen, "The Original Language of the Book of Mormon: Upstate New York Dialect, King James English, or Hebrew?" Paper given at the annual symposium of the Association for Mormon Letters, Westminster College, Salt Lake City, Utah, 23 January 1993 (to appear in the 1993–94 proceedings of the Association for Mormon Letters), 4–8.

- 14    yea and if he sayeth unto the earth thou shalt go back that it lengthen out the day for many hours *and* it is done . . . >  $\emptyset$  (1837)
- 16    and behold also if he sayeth unto the waters of the great deep be thou dried up *and* it is done >  $\emptyset$  (1837)
- 17    behold if he sayeth unto this mountain be thou raised up and come over and fall upon that city that it be buried up *and* behold it is done . . . >  $\emptyset$  (1837)
- 19    and if the Lord shall say be thou accursed that no man shall find thee from this time henceforth and forever *and* behold no man getteth it henceforth and forever >  $\emptyset$  (1837)
- 20    and behold if the Lord shall say unto a man because of thine iniquities thou shalt be accursed forever *and* it shall be done >  $\emptyset$  (1837)
- 21    and if the Lord shall say because of thine iniquities thou shalt be cut off from my presence *and* he will cause that it shall be so >  $\emptyset$  (1837)

Because of its ungrammaticality in English, this construction was completely removed in the second (Kirtland, 1837) edition of the Book of Mormon. This construction is a literalistic translation of the Hebrew-language construction, but does not occur at all in the King James Bible.

Another case of a non-English Hebraism in the original text of the Book of Mormon is the “overuse” of the phrase *it came to pass*. I do not use this term “overuse” to refer to the overall supposed “excessiveness” of the phrase in the Book of Mormon text. Rather, I am referring to at least 47 examples of this phrase in the original text that seemed redundant or unnecessary and were thus removed in the second edition. For instance, we find examples like this one from 2 Nephi 4:10, where two occurrences are found within the same sentence:

**and it came to pass that** when my father had made an end of speaking unto them behold *it came to pass that* he spake unto the sons of Ishmael yea and even all his household >  $\emptyset$  (1837)

The second occurrence of this phrase was removed in the 1837 edition of the Book of Mormon, yet there are examples of this same “overuse” in the original Hebrew-language text, but not in the King James Bible (see, for example, Genesis 27:30).<sup>26</sup>

These examples of non-English Hebraisms provide a real problem for Metcalfe and his colleagues. Their research program requires them to find some nineteenth-century English-language basis for everything in the Book of Mormon. For instance, in order to disprove the Hebraic origin of the *if-and* construction, Ed Ashment argues (pp. 361–63) that such constructions occur in the early revelations of Joseph Smith. But in actual fact, all except one of Ashment’s examples (p. 385) are of the form *and-if*, which he misleadingly identifies as “If + And (inverted)”:

*and* their testimony shall also go forth unto the condemnation of this generation *if* they harden their hearts against them (D&C 5:18)

*and* behold I grant unto you a gift *if* you desire of me to translate even as my servant Joseph (D&C 6:25)

*and* misery thou shalt receive *if* thou wilt slight these counsels (D&C 19:33)

Now all of these examples are perfectly acceptable as English. Nor has there been any tendency to eliminate this *and-if* construction from the Doctrine and Covenants, unlike the fourteen Book of Mormon occurrences of the *if-and* construction, all of which had been removed by the time the 1837 edition of the Book of Mormon was published.

Ashment’s fourth “counterexample” (p. 385) is supposed to be an actual *if-and* example:

but *if* he deny this he will break the covenant which he has before covenanted with me *and* behold he is condemned (D&C 5:27)

Of course, this is not really an *if-and* example, for the subordinate clause “if he deny this” modifies the immediately following independent clause “he will break the covenant which he has

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<sup>26</sup> See the discussion in Skousen, “The Original Language of the Book of Mormon,” 6–7.



before covenanted with me” and not the distant resultive clause “and behold he is condemned.” This fourth example actually belongs under Ashment’s “If + O” class (p. 380). (Here Ashment’s capital letter O supposedly stands for the mathematical null symbol  $\emptyset$ ). So in actuality Ashment has no examples of the non-English *if-and* construction from the early revelations of Joseph Smith.

### The Dictation Sequence

Finally, I turn to Brent Metcalfe’s own article at the end of the book (pp. 395–444). Here Metcalfe discusses the order of dictation for the current text of the Book of Mormon. After completing the book of Lehi and apparently starting the book of Mosiah, Joseph Smith lent 116 pages of manuscript to Martin Harris, who ultimately had these pages stolen from him. Metcalfe discusses three possible dictation sequences, identified according to which book was first translated after Joseph Smith started translating again: (1) 1 Nephi, (2) Words of Mormon, or (3) Mosiah. But ultimately Metcalfe’s intent is not only to resolve this issue, but also to argue for his “naturalistic” interpretation of the Book of Mormon — namely, that Joseph Smith himself is the author.

The Book of Mormon critical text project is also interested in resolving this question regarding the dictation sequence, but thus far the overall evidence has been inconclusive. A possible solution could involve evidence from the original manuscript, such as identifying the two unknown scribes in 1 Nephi or actually finding fragments from the transition that occurs between the Words of Mormon and Mosiah. Unfortunately, the Wilford Wood fragments<sup>27</sup> just missed providing us with evidence from the transition; we have fragments from Enos, which is near, but not close enough.

Identity of paper type could also provide evidence for the dictation sequence. The paper type changes fairly frequently in both manuscripts. The original manuscript shows five different kinds of paper for extant pages. (We have fragments from 236 pages, nearly half the estimated 480 pages that were in the original manuscript.) Preliminary examination of the paper types in the printer’s manuscript shows at least six types of paper. These

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<sup>27</sup> Skousen, “Piecing Together the Original Manuscript,” 21.

changes in paper type provide evidence that Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery obtained paper at fairly frequent intervals during the dictation and copying process.

Now if the paper type at the end of the original manuscript is the same as the beginning of the printer's manuscript, we would have some physical evidence (but not proof) for the dictation sequence. On the other hand, a difference in paper types at potential junctures does not disprove a particular dictation hypothesis. In any event, as evidence for the Nephi first hypothesis, we would need to find paper identity between the end of Moroni and the first gathering of the printer's manuscript. Unfortunately, we currently have no extant fragments from the book of Moroni, although we do have fragments from the end of Ether, which may actually be close enough. As evidence for the Mosiah first hypothesis, we would look for paper identity between the end of the small plates and the first gathering of the printer's manuscript. As already noted, we do not have fragments at this potential juncture, but we do have paper samples from Enos, which is close to the end of the small plates. Thus far the paper analysis of the printer's manuscript has only been preliminary, but as part of the critical text project we plan to make a direct physical comparison between the paper types of the two manuscripts.

Internal evidence from the original manuscript, such as changes in pagination or in Oliver Cowdery's spelling, may also provide evidence for the dictation sequence. Metcalfe's article seeks to add another kind of internal evidence from the text—namely, stylistic shifts in lexical usage. And of course, there is also historical evidence, such as Oliver Cowdery's identification of a passage in 3 Nephi as the reference to baptism that resulted in the bestowal of the Aaronic Priesthood on 15 May 1829.<sup>28</sup>

Unfortunately, Metcalfe's own argumentation suffers, not only from insufficient information, but also from an overzealous desire to undermine our traditional understanding of the text and its history. Consider Metcalfe's statement that "it seems less than coincidental that while preparing *P* [the printer's manuscript] for publication, [Joseph] Smith in the 1830 Preface ascribed a length to the lost manuscript [of 116 pages] almost exactly corresponding to the replacement text in *P*" (p. 395). The

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<sup>28</sup> Welch and Rathbone, "The Translation of the Book of Mormon," 33-37.

idea suggested here is that Joseph Smith allowed his recollection of the number of lost pages to be influenced by the number of pages needed to reach Mosiah in the printer's manuscript.

The problem with Metcalfe's suggestion is that only 24 pages of the printer's manuscript were in existence when the type was set (near the end of August 1829) for the first signature of the 1830 edition (which contains the preface). Internal evidence from the printer's manuscript and historical statements clearly demonstrate that the printer's manuscript was produced as needed throughout the printing process, not all at once. To begin the typesetting, Oliver Cowdery only copied enough material from the original manuscript to produce the first gathering of the printer's manuscript (namely, 24 pages), nowhere near the 116 pages that Metcalfe's speculation entails.

### Chapters in the Book of Mormon

Metcalfe's presentation gives the impression that he is thoroughly conversant with the details of the two manuscripts, although all the sources for his information are secondary. As a consequence, his descriptions are frequently inaccurate and misguided. First of all, Metcalfe does not understand the origin of the chapter system in the two manuscripts. Evidence suggests that as Joseph Smith was translating, he apparently saw some mark (or perhaps extra spacing) whenever a section ended, but was unable to see the text that followed. At such junctures, Joseph decided to refer to these endings as chapter breaks and told the scribe to write the word "chapter" at these places, but without specifying any number for the chapter since Joseph saw neither a number nor the word "chapter."

The evidence for this conclusion is abundant. First of all, the word "chapter" otherwise never appears in the Book of Mormon text. Moreover, "Chapter" appears in the original manuscript at the very beginning of a section, even before the title of a new book. Thus "Chapter" was originally incorrectly written at the end of 1 Nephi and before the beginning of 2 Nephi. Only later was this chapter specification crossed out by Oliver Cowdery and placed after the title of the book ("The Book of Nephi"):

<Chapter <V> VIII>  
second            Chapter I  
The ^ Book of Nephi ^ An account of the death of Lehi . . .

(In this transcription from the original manuscript, angled brackets < > are used to refer to a crossout.) In addition, "Chapter" is assigned to small books that contain only one section (such as Enos, Jarom, and Omni). And the chapter numbers are added later, in heavier ink and more carefully written (sometimes even with serifs). In one place in the printer's manuscript the added number is in blue ink rather than the normal black (now turned brown).

And sometimes the inserted chapter numbers are incorrect. For instance, at the beginning of 2 Nephi (see the above transcription), the initial "Chapter" is assigned the number VIII as if it were the next chapter in 1 Nephi (which in the original text contained seven chapters). Moreover, in numbering the chapters in Mosiah in the printer's manuscript, Oliver Cowdery accidentally skipped one number when he came to chapter 8 and incorrectly listed it as "Chapter IX." This misnumbering then continues through to the end of Mosiah. The compositor caught the error and corrected the misnumbered chapters in the printer's manuscript in pencil (except for chapter 12 which remains unchanged as "Chapter 13"). This same misnumbering of chapters 8-13 as 9-14 may have also occurred in the original manuscript, but we have no extant fragments from Mosiah to confirm this.

Nonetheless, Metcalfe is mistaken when he assumes that this numbering error for Mosiah 8-13 is related to the misnumbering that is found at the beginning of our current book of Mosiah. Here Oliver Cowdery originally wrote "Chapter III," then changed this to "Chapter I" by deleting the last two numbers. This is characteristic of how Oliver corrected mistakes. Contrary to Metcalfe's interpretation (pp. 405-6), Oliver Cowdery definitely did *not* first write "Chapter II" and then cross out the whole number and insert a *I* before the crossed-out *II*. All three *I*'s have the same ink flow and spacing. Based on Oliver's scribal practice, I would argue that if Oliver had written *II* and wanted to change it to *I*, he would have either crossed out the second *I* or crossed out both *I*'s and followed it with a single *I* with an intervening space.

Metcalfe is undoubtedly correct in his interpretation of the inserted title ("the Book of Mosiah") and the missing summary in the printer's manuscript (p. 405). Based on the misnumbering of the chapters near the beginning of Mosiah, I would argue for the following relationship between the large and small plates:

large plates

Lehi

small plates

Nephi (I)

Nephi (II)

Jacob

Enos

Jarom

Omni

(Amaron, Chemish,  
Abinadom)

Mosiah "Chapter I"

(Amaleki)

[the reign of king Mosiah]  
[ascension of king Benjamin]

Mosiah "Chapter II"

The Words of Mormon

[the reign of king Benjamin]

Mosiah "Chapter III"

[beginning of our present Mosiah]

Thus the beginning of our current Mosiah corresponds originally with the beginning of the third chapter of Mosiah. This explains not only the inserted title and missing summary, but also the abrupt beginning of our present book of Mosiah ("And now there was no more contention in all the land of Zarahemla").

All of this leads me to believe that the lost 116 pages included not only all of Lehi, but also part of Chapter I of the original Mosiah. Joseph Smith retained from the summer of 1828 some small portion of the translation (D&C 10:41) and may have added a few additional pages translated in March 1829 (D&C 5:30), just prior to Oliver Cowdery's arrival in the following month. In all, these pages probably included the following portions from the beginning of the original Mosiah: the rest of chapter I, all of chapter II, and perhaps the beginning of chapter III. In fact, these few pages could have been part of the original manuscript that was placed in the cornerstone of the Nauvoo House in 1841. If so, they could well have been crossed out so as not to repeat the end of Amaleki's account (from the book of Omni in the small plates) and the material Mormon covered in his transitional "The Words of Mormon."

### Nonrandom Sequences of Lexical Variants

Finally, I turn to Metcalfe's discussion of the lexical variation between *therefore* and *wherefore* in the Book of Mormon text. Metcalfe finds some interesting transitions in the usage of these two words. Basically, *wherefore* dominates in the small plates, *therefore* prevails from Mosiah to part way through Ether, then for the remainder of the Book of Mormon *wherefore* once again dominates. Metcalfe argues that there are not two transitions, but only one. Under the Mosiah first hypothesis, the text starts with *therefore* and then part way through Ether the transition to *wherefore* occurs, which then explains why *wherefore* dominates both the beginning and ending of the Book of Mormon. As support for this claim, Metcalfe argues that Joseph Smith's revelations up through May 1829 have *therefore*, but from June 1829 on, his revelations and other scriptural writings have *wherefore*. This does not, however, prove Metcalfe's conclusion that Joseph Smith is the one making this choice. As I have argued elsewhere,<sup>29</sup> other evidence suggests "tight control" over the text. Nonetheless, the translation was given through Joseph Smith and reflects his English. As a result, a change in Joseph's language could also show up as the translation was received over a period of months. Even so, the language of the original text includes King James expressions and non-English Hebraisms that are uncharacteristic of Joseph Smith's upstate New York English.

In any event, I would suggest a few cautions and a more systematic research strategy in looking for stylistic change in the Book of Mormon text. My first caution deals with Metcalfe's assumption that *therefore* and *wherefore* are semantically and syntactically equivalent, and therefore freely exchangeable. Yet this is not the case. In fact, as Dwight Bolinger has argued on many occasions, there are probably no examples of synonymy that permit complete interchangeability of words. (See, for instance, Bolinger's discussion of systematic differences between *somebody* and *someone*.)<sup>30</sup> For the case of *therefore* and *wherefore* in the Book of Mormon text, we find that these

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<sup>29</sup> Skousen, "Towards a Critical Edition of the Book of Mormon," 50-56.

<sup>30</sup> Dwight Bolinger, "The In-Group; *One* and Its Compounds," in Peter A. Reich, ed., *The Second LACUS Forum 1975* (Columbia, SC: Hornbeam, 1976), 229-37.

words are not completely interchangeable. For example, there is an interrogative occurrence of *wherefore* ("wherefore can ye doubt") in 1 Nephi 4:3 for which *therefore* could hardly be substituted. In addition, the Book of Mormon text contains examples in which *therefore* is preceded by a conjunctive element such as *and* or *now*, but *wherefore* is always clause initial: there are 18 occurrences of "and therefore," but none of "and wherefore"; similarly, four occurrences of "now therefore," but none of "now wherefore." This difference between the two words is also suggested in the (*Compact*) *Oxford English Dictionary*, which lists "and therefore" as the synonym for *wherefore*, not simply "therefore."<sup>31</sup> All of this implies a discourse difference between *therefore* and *wherefore*, that the variation in usage between these two words in the Book of Mormon text may be due more to differences in discourse structure than simply lexical alternation. In other words, the variation between *wherefore* and *therefore* cannot be discussed without considering larger questions of narrative structure, in particular the role of conjunctive elements.

A second caution has to do with the lack of statistics in Metcalfe's article. It would be easy to show that the order of occurrences of *therefore* and *wherefore* in the Book of Mormon text is highly significant—in fact, it is statistically significant under any of the three hypotheses concerning the order of dictation. The same high statistical significance holds for Foster's example of *whoso* and *whosoever* (pp. 408–9). The appropriate test for verifying the nonrandomness of a sequence of occurrences is the nonparametric ordinary runs test.<sup>32</sup> The inadequacy of Metcalfe's nonstatistical approach becomes all too apparent when, based on intuition only, he dismisses Foster's suggestion that there is a nonrandom order for the occurrences of *oft* and *often* in the Book of Mormon text. Under the null hypothesis of randomness, the order statistic for the sequencing of *oft* and *often* (again for all three dictation hypotheses) occurs with a cumulative probability of 0.097. Although this probability is not significant enough for most statisticians (except at a level of

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<sup>31</sup> *The (Compact) Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), 2d ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), 2302.

<sup>32</sup> As described in Jean Dickinson Gibbons, *Nonparametric Methods for Quantitative Analysis*, 2d ed. (Columbus, OH: American Sciences, 1985), 363–71.

significance of 0.1), it still indicates some possibility that the variation for these two words may not be random.

But there is one additional problem with Metcalfe's decision to ignore the variation between *oft* and *often*. If he had considered the effects of "literary dependency" (pp. 409–11), he would have discovered that the sequencing for *oft/often* is statistically nonrandom. In his analysis of *wherefore* and *therefore*, Metcalfe systematically eliminated all cases of quotation, from either biblical sources or from Joseph Smith's earlier revelations. Applying this same procedure to the case of *oft/often*, we remove one occurrence of *often* (in 3 Nephi 24:16) since it is a quotation from Malachi 3:16, with the result that all three remaining occurrences of *often* (namely, Enos 1:3, Mosiah 18:25, and Mosiah 26:30) occur together without *oft* intervening. Statistically, the resulting cumulative probability is a low 0.020. And once more, we get this same result for all three of the dictation hypotheses.

In order to test Metcalfe's theory, we must see if the Book of Mormon text contains other variants in lexical choice that contradict Metcalfe's conclusions. Are there, for instance, sequences showing more than one transition? In particular, are there examples of the text first favoring one word (or phrase), then another, and then finally preferring the original word (or phrase)? This last question is actually equivalent to asking whether there is evidence for other dictation sequences!

As a hypothetical example, consider the use of the archaic *privily* versus *secretly* in the Book of Mormon text. All four occurrences of *privily* are found in Alma (14:3, 35:5, 51:34, and 52:35), whereas the three occurrences of *secretly* occur outside of Alma: two in Mosiah (19:18 and 27:10) and one in 3 Nephi (6:23). Under any of the three given dictation hypotheses, this sequencing cannot be considered statistically nonrandom (since the number of runs has a cumulative probability of 0.200, which is too large). But if we choose to consider the hypothesis that Joseph Smith first started dictating Alma rather than Mosiah or 1 Nephi, we would get a cumulative probability of 0.057, which may be low enough to consider the change from *privily* to *secretly* statistically significant and to argue that Joseph Smith really started with Alma!

Returning to our example of *oft/often*, we find even stronger support for this "Alma first" hypothesis. All three occurrences of *often* occur together just before the book of Alma, with the result



that the text has only *oft* until switching to *often* someplace between 1 Nephi and Enos. In fact, the text contains four occurrences of *oft* in 3 Nephi 10:4–6, in direct opposition to the occurrence of *often* in the biblical passage that it paraphrases (Matthew 23:37):

*3 Nephi 10:*

how *oft* have I gathered you as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings (verse 4)

how *oft* would I have gathered you as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings (verse 5)

how *oft* would I have gathered you as a hen gathereth her chickens and ye would not (verse 5)

how *oft* will I gather you as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings (verse 6)

*Matthew 23:*

how *often* would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not (verse 37)

Under the “Alma first” hypothesis, the chances that the resulting sequence is random equals 0.002, a very small value. And even if the four examples of *oft* in 3 Nephi 10 are eliminated because of “literary dependency,” the resulting sequence remains highly nonrandom; the chances that the resulting sequence is random is still a very small number, 0.004.

But are these examples of *oft/often* and *privily/secretly* enough to convince us of the priority of Alma? To be sure, Metcalfe’s analysis of *wherefore/therefore* (as well as *whoso/whosoever*) is interesting, but we must do more than rely on a couple of examples. We need to look for many different examples of nonrandom sequencing to see what overall patterns exist. (And undoubtedly we need to extend our examples to include synonymous phrases as well as individual words.) We must always be suspicious of “linguistic numerology.” Given a finite random sequence, we can always find cases of nonrandomness. In fact, there must be some cases of nonrandomness; otherwise, we wouldn’t really have a (finite) random sequence!

## Conclusion

Ed Ashment, in his summary of what he calls “modern apologetics” for the Book of Mormon, argues that “scouring” the Book of Mormon text for “evidence” is insufficient and unacceptable as a critical methodology (pp. 337–38). Indeed, defenders of the Book of Mormon have sometimes practiced “text scouring,” but surely Metcalfe’s own book represents the very same practice, as exemplified by the numerous examples discussed in this review.

Instead of looking for isolated examples, we need systematic and holistic studies of the original text of the Book of Mormon as well as the specific documents that underlie that text (namely, the original and printer’s manuscripts and the first three editions). And hardly any of this effort can be done without a critical edition of the Book of Mormon. In this review I have noted some of the Book of Mormon critical text issues that Metcalfe’s book fails to consider: empirical evidence for the principles of manuscript transmission; errors in the manuscripts; types of textual changes; a complete analysis of manuscript corrections; sources for biblical quotations in the Book of Mormon; variation in italics in the King James Bible; textual variation in Early Modern English Bibles (from Tyndale’s translations through the King James Version); the reliability of statements made by witnesses of the translation; independent evidence for Joseph Smith’s knowledge of the Bible; the origin of the original chapter system; the language style of the original English text of the Book of Mormon (including the question of non-English Hebraisms, biblical English, and upstate New York English); the dictation sequence and the difficulties in determining that sequence; spelling variation in the manuscripts; stylistic variance in the text; and the overall discourse and narrative structure of the text.

I began my work on the critical text over five years ago and without any prejudgment as to what I might find. To my delight (and frequent amazement), I have found that the original manuscript provides firm evidence in support of what Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery, and all witnesses have testified: that Joseph Smith was not the author of the Book of Mormon, but instead he received its English translation by revelation from the Lord through the use of the Urim and Thummim and the seer stone. All of the systematic studies of the Book of Mormon text that I am aware of are consistent with this claim.