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Progress Report on the Book of Mormon Critical Text Project

Royal Skousen

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PROGRESS REPORT
ON THE BOOK OF MORMON
CRITICAL TEXT PROJECT

Royal Skousen
Department of English
Brigham Young University

CURRENT STATUS OF THE 5-YEAR PROJECT (as of 14 April 1990; begun in May 1988):

Original Manuscript (O):

(only about 25% is extant: 1 Nephi 2 → 2 Nephi 1 and Alma 22 → Helaman 3, with gaps; plus other fragments)

permission of First Presidency of the LDS Church to make transcription of the original manuscript: photos on loan from the LDS historical department

fragment at University of Utah: photo purchased

work done (excluding a few difficult-to-read fragments):

first transcription by Royal Skousen
second transcription by Lyle Fletcher and Marcello Hunter
line-by-line comparison of two transcriptions
a single transcript from the two independent transcriptions

work to be done:

identify the few remaining unidentified fragments
check transcriptions against actual manuscript
compare O against P and printed editions

Printer’s Manuscript (P):

(all extant except for 4 lines from 1 Nephi 1)

enlarged photographic reproduction on loan from RLDS Church Historian (Richard Howard)

work done:

first transcription by Royal Skousen
second transcription by Lawrence Skousen
line-by-line comparison of two transcriptions through Mormon 4
work to be done:

finish line-by-line comparison of two transcriptions
compare against 0 and printed editions
distinguish between the three correctors of P

Scanning of Important Editions of the Book of Mormon
(+ finished, - partially finished)

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Publication Plans:

transcripts of 0 and P

critical edition:

original text as dictated by Joseph Smith
(to the extent that it can be determined)

dictated format: limited punctuation,
but modern spelling and lexical capitalization

apparatus: all significant textual variants
(including all meaning differences
and some spelling and punctuation differences)

current LDS and RLDS versifications (in the margins)
cross-references to explicitly quoted biblical passages
computer collation of all variants (including spelling and punctuation)

commentary on the Book of Mormon text

Financial Support:

Brigham Young University

Department of English
College of Humanities
Religious Studies Center

Foundation for Ancient Research & Mormon Studies (FARMS)

Special Assistance:

Jack Welch (FARMS): photos of O and P, Book of Mormon editions

Richard Howard (RLDS Church Historian): 1892R, 1908R, photos of P

Glenn Rowe (LDS Historical Department): photos and provenance of O

Larry Draper (LDS Historical Department): 1837, 1840, 1849, 1852, 1858W, 1874R, 1879, 1905

Wilford Wood family: 1830

Wendell Ashton, David Tiplady (Cambridge University Press): 1841

John Williams, George Florence: 1953R

Bob Wilcock: 1981

Brigham Young University library: 1911, 1920

EVIDENCE FROM THE ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPT

(1) The original manuscript (O) is a dictated manuscript.

mishearings

1 Nephi 13:29 and because of these things which are taken away out of the gospel of the lamb and exceeding [an exceeding] great many do stumble
and whoso shall lay their hands upon me shall wither even as a dried weed [reed]

nevertheless for my name sake [name's sake] I will defer mine anger

therefore my sons see [son see] that ye are merciful unto your brethren

but he sayeth unto <him> them fear not

and as we suppose that [supposed that] it was their intent to slay us before Antipus should overtake them

corrected spellings of names [supports witnesses' claims that Joseph Smith spelled out names]

<Zenock> Zenoch (Alma 33:15)

<Coriantummer> Coriantumr (Helaman 1:15)

Amalickiah (Alma 46:3) > Am(a)lickiah >>
Ameleckiah (Alma 46:11-52:8)
|| Amalickiah (Alma 54:16)

[Joseph Smith's pronunciation: stress on first syllable rather than second]

(2) Joseph Smith spells out the first occurrence of Book of Mormon names and apparently respells names later on if necessary.

(3) Joseph Smith dealt with 20-30 words at a time.

crossouts showing OC skipping ahead

20 words (Alma 56:41):

and it came to pass that again <we saw the Lamanites> when the light of the morning came we saw the Lamanites upon us

25 words (Alma 45:21)
[the only example of Joseph Smith editing the text?]

for behold because of their wars with the Lamanites <they had become exceedingly [ ]in[ ]> and the many little dissensions and disturbances which had been among the people it became expedient
Joseph Smith acts as scribe?

28 words (Alma 45:22)

yea in every city throughout all the land which was possessed by the people of Nephi and it came to pass that they did appoint priests and teachers

[on three lines in Alma 45:22: and written out, c's without loops, p does not close; agrees with Joseph Smith's handwriting (as found in Dean Jesse's The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith); darker, carefully written; definitely not Oliver Cowdery's hand]

(4) There is little or no evidence of Joseph Smith changing his mind [providing we (correctly) interpret the or explanations as originally in the plates].

(5) The word "chapter" did not appear at section breaks, yet there was a clear indication of a break in the text.

chapter never appears within the text itself; Chap(ter) written whenever there is a break in the text; numbers added later (darker and more carefully written); wrong numbers sometimes inserted and then corrected; chapter incorrectly inserted at the beginning of 2 Nephi:

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

(6) The punctuation marks made by John Gilbert (the compositor of the 1830 edition) appear on the fragment from 3 Nephi 26-27. Thus 0 was used at least once as the "printer's" manuscript.

maximal potential use of 0 as the "printer’s" manuscript (according to the missing punctuation marks on P):
H  taman 9 through Mormon

In addition, the 1840 edition may also serve as a potential source for recovering the text of 0 (since 0 was occasionally used to correct the text for that edition).

(7) In copying P from 0, Oliver Cowdery made an average of a little more than 3 textual changes per manuscript page when copying someone else’s hand, but only 2 changes per page when copying his own hand. Thus far 274 textual changes have been noted for the extant portion of 0 (about 25% of the original text). Most of these changes are natural transcriptional
errors and have not been known before. I would estimate that somewhat over a thousand textual changes were made in producing P from O. Nonetheless, these errors do not significantly change the Book of Mormon text.

two changes recently discovered from the fragments:

1 Nephi 15:36  the wicked are separated from the righteous > rejected
O: (s)eoperated fro(m) [scribe 2]

Alma 27:27  and they were numbered among the people of Nephi and also numbered among the people which were of the church of God > Ø
O: ( )ered among

(8) There is little evidence of conscious editing in producing P from O. The text of P introduces many hard readings and is not expansionary, contrary to the normal assumptions of textual criticism. Later editing of the Book of Mormon text does show the normal development of text (namely, introduction of easier readings and an expansionary text). O is clearly superior to P.

(9) The 1974 Ruth Smith fragment (from 2 Nephi 4-5) is probably part of the material from the cornerstone of the Nauvoo house originally sent by Major Bidamon to Joseph Smith III. This fragment from O appears to be fully authentic, despite an extraordinary provenance.

(10) The 1984 University of Chicago acquisition (two sheets from Alma 3-5) is a forgery. There is no firm provenance; and the document itself contains many spellings that are highly unlikely for Oliver Cowdery to have produced. In addition, the handwriting is too large, there are no headings, and there are too many lines on each manuscript page.

A schematic comparison of the two Book of Mormon manuscripts (O and P) is reproduced on the following page.