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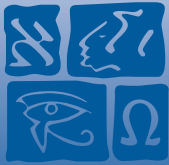
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Insights

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Restoring the Original Text of the Book of Mormon

Elegantly produced and weighing in at 652 pages, the first part of volume 4 in Professor Royal Skousen's ongoing Book of Mormon critical text project has just come from the press. Volumes 1 and 2, containing transcripts of the original manuscript and the printer's manuscript of the Book of Mormon, were published by FARMS in 2001. Volume 3, which will describe the history of the Book of Mormon text from Joseph Smith's original dictation through the current standard editions, will appear after all parts of volume 4 have been published. Volume 3 will include a complete analysis of the grammatical editing of the Book of Mormon.

Entitled *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon*, this fourth volume considers every significant change that has occurred in the English Book of Mormon over the 175 years since Joseph Smith first dictated it to his scribes; it also considers a number of conjectured revisions for specific passages. It draws not only upon the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon and upon the printer's manuscript prepared by Oliver Cowdery and two other scribes but also upon 20 significant printed versions ranging from the 1830 edition to the current standard editions published by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the Community of Christ (formerly known as the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints). In certain cases, Professor Skousen, an internationally known professor of linguistics and English language at Brigham Young University who has directed the Book of Mormon critical text project for the past 16 years, carefully analyzes evidence from usage elsewhere in the Book of Mormon to assist in establishing the original reading. Moreover, where applicable, he marshals additional evidence of language usage from dialectal and earlier English, as well as data from the King James Bible and the original

biblical languages, Hebrew and Greek. His purpose throughout is, as precisely as human means permit, to recover the original English-language text of the Book of Mormon. Part 1 of volume 4 commences with the title page and the witness statements and then proceeds from 1 Nephi 1 through 2 Nephi 10. It thus represents approximately one-seventh of the Book of Mormon as we have it. Successive parts of volume 4

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FARMS Review Offers Wide Coverage, Thoughtful Analysis

At nearly 500 pages, the latest issue of the FARMS Review (vol. 16, no. 1) continues its pattern of offering wide-ranging coverage and in-depth analysis aimed at encouraging reliable scholarship and helping readers make informed judgments about recent publications in the field of Mormon studies.

In the introduction, associate editor George L. Mitton notes the developing trend of "anti-Mormon writings deriving from the secular/agnostic/atheist wing rather than from sectarian sources" and the growing need to respond to those writings. He explains why, when evaluating publications critical of Mormonism, contributors to the *Review* consider not only the work itself but the author's past writings, preparation, and known prejudices and attitudes. From there Mitton reviews early attempts to discredit the Smith family (especially Joseph Jr.) and offers instructive correctives and comments.


Alan Goff responds to three essays in the controversial books *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon* and *American Apocrypha* that rely on the "Mosiah-first" theory of the Book of Mormon composition to support their claim that the book is of modern origin. These critics argue that after losing the 116 pages of manuscript, Joseph Smith wrote the books of Mosiah

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Ancient Exegesis cont. from p. 5

manipulated and changed. It should be noted, likewise, that the scribes in many cases were probably not guilty of malfeasance but were attempting to make the text relevant to their current situation. In the end, as Fishbane concludes, the Hebrew Bible, “despite its authoritative character, is not a ‘clean’ or ‘corrected’ text-copy, but rather a compound of errors, corrections, and supplements” (p. 38).

The study of inner-biblical allusion and exegesis reveals the need for contemporary students of scripture to be intimately familiar with a broad range of biblical tradition, because often allusion and interpretation are found only with a thorough knowledge of the Old Testament text. As Fishbane notes, “Aside from [a] few instances of *explicit* citation or referral, the vast majority of cases of . . . exegesis in the Hebrew Bible involve *implicit* or virtual

citations” (p. 285). That is, prophets assumed their readers and listeners would have been so familiar with the tradition that a word or two would suffice to indicate to the audience a whole conceptual field.⁶ Thus, if we are to get at the fullest meaning of scripture, we must attempt to approximate the ancient familiarity with texts and traditions. 

By Cory Daniel Crawford

Notes

1. “The Bible’s Earliest Interpreters,” *Prooftexts* 7 (1987): 352.
2. *Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to the Bible as It Was at the Start of the Common Era* (1998), 297, 308–11.
3. See, for example, *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch (1998).
4. “Prophecy,” in *It Is Written: Scripture Citing Scripture*, ed. D. A. Garson and H. G. M. Williamson [1988], 39.
5. See *Traditions of the Bible*, 14–19.
6. See S. Niditch, *Oral World and Written Word* (1996), 9–11.

Original Text cont. from page 1

will be published at the rate of one per year over the next four years until the entire text is analyzed.

Here in part 1 of volume 4, Professor Skousen examines 774 cases of variation or potential variation in his quest to determine the original reading of the Book of Mormon text. In 420 instances, the current standard version varies from his proposed original text, and 157 of these have never appeared in any standard printed edition of the Book of Mormon. Most of the 420 differences involve variation in phraseology, but 75 of them alter the meaning in ways that would affect translation—though never in a manner that changes either doctrinal content or the fundamental meaning of the text.

One of the most important findings of the critical text project, says Professor Skousen, is that “the original text of the Book of Mormon is much more consistent in its usage and phraseology than the current standard text.” Occasional errors of transmission have created what he terms textual “wrinkles,” where novelties have been introduced instead of the words and phrases that are consistently found elsewhere in the text.

For example, in our current version, 1 Nephi 8:31 states that Lehi “saw other multitudes *feeling*

their way” toward the tree of life. However, Professor Skousen observes that the original text is wholly consistent elsewhere in representing people as *pressing*, never *feeling*, their way. As it turns out and just as one might have expected, the original reading of 1 Nephi 8:31 explains that Lehi “saw other multitudes *pressing* their way” toward the tree of life. When Oliver Cowdery was preparing the printer’s manuscript, he misread the handwriting in the original manuscript of the unknown scribe 3, mistaking *pressing* for *feeling*.

At 1 Nephi 10:10, the current text describes John the Baptist as having baptized the Lamb of God, “who should take away the *sins* of the world.” But the original manuscript reads *sin*, in the singular. Elsewhere, the original Book of Mormon text normally speaks of the Savior as taking away the (plural) sins of mankind, but in the two places where it speaks of the atonement in connection with John’s baptism of Jesus (here in 1 Nephi 10:10 and in 2 Nephi 31:4), it uses the singular *sin*—precisely as does John the Baptist himself in the New Testament (see John 1:29).


1 Nephi 12:18 refers, in our current editions, to “the *word* of the justice of the eternal God.” But, in every similar case elsewhere, the Book of Mormon alludes to the *sword*, not the *word*, of God’s justice. And once again, Professor Skousen demon-

strates that Oliver Cowdery miscopied the original manuscript's *sword*, thus creating an inconsistent "wrinkle" in the text.

Other corrections include identifying the devil as the "proprietor" of hell at 1 Nephi 15:35, rather than as its "preparator," and changing the spelling of the name of a nonbiblical Old World prophet from *Zenock* to *Zenoch* (which, incidentally, is more acceptable as a Hebrew name).

An interesting case occurs at 2 Nephi 7:11, where the printer's manuscript has "behold all ye that *kindleth* fire." Professor Skousen argues persuasively that Oliver Cowdery misheard Joseph Smith's dictated "kindle a fire"—which, of course, sounds very similar—and notes it as evidence that the original manu-

script, for which this portion of the text is missing, was, just as Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery always said it was, orally dictated rather than copied.

Professor Skousen's critical text project is a landmark of meticulous, painstaking academic research, representing a high point in the history of Latter-day Saint scholarship. For decades, detractors of the Book of Mormon have pointed to textual changes in the book as evidence of its falsehood. Now, at a level of careful scholarship far beyond anything ever produced on this subject by any critic of the book, Royal Skousen has shown, without having set out to do so, that the text of the Book of Mormon is even more impressive than believers have previously recognized. 

FARMS Review cont. from p. 1

through Moroni and then wrote 1 and 2 Nephi last. The translation sequence is not in question, but the critics' application of it (which spares them the complex work of responsible textual analysis) is. For example, Goff refutes the idea that the Book of Mormon from Mosiah on shows no awareness of Nephi's prophecies of Christ's ministry in the New World because Joseph composed 1 and 2 Nephi last. He does this by demonstrating the integrity of the Book of Mormon's self-reference—its allusions to earlier passages that would have posed a major creative challenge had those subtleties been fabricated with nothing yet to allude to. Goff contends that "the evidence [for the Mosiah-first theory] ought to rely less on the ideological assumptions that there were no gold plates and that Joseph Smith composed a modern novel" and more on tools of textual analysis that revisionists conveniently ignore.

Daniel C. Peterson and Matthew Roper reveal Stan Larson's undersupported arguments regarding Thomas S. Ferguson's ventures in Book of Mormon archaeology. Ferguson was an amateur archaeologist who, critics claim, lost faith in the Book of Mormon after what they characterize as his expert research in the field. Larson's book on Ferguson, *Quest for the Gold Plates: Thomas Stuart Ferguson's Archaeological Search for the Book of Mormon*, is based on that claim. Peterson and Roper show the book to be flawed and inconclusive and its presentation of facts to be

incomplete. For example, Ferguson's family contests the statement that he lost his testimony of the Book of Mormon. Moreover, if it is true that his faith was undermined, it was due to his shallow research and not to a lack of evidence. The reviewers also discuss Larson's choice to ignore the qualified research of Ferguson's contemporaries, the lack of credible proof in Ferguson's own work, and recent extensive research on pre-Columbian Mesoamerica that shows Larson's claims to be largely founded on assumption.

In another review, M. Gerald Bradford appraises *From the Last Supper through the Resurrection*, a book edited by BYU religion professors Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Thomas A. Wayment. The book details new insights into key events of the last two days of the Savior's mortal ministry. Bradford notes the sometimes complex but always rewarding nature of the studies and then explains how the various contributors achieve a good representation of the diverse opinions on the subject matter while expressing their testimonies of the Savior. He concludes that this anthology will be valuable within and outside the Latter-day Saint faith because of its scholarship and unique perspective.

Two other reviews treat topics of unique interest. In his review of Gavin Menzies's book *1421, the Year China Discovered America*, John A. Tvedtnes outlines current evidence for an early Chinese presence in the Americas and explains how those findings might contribute to Book of Mormon research.

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